

TEXAS SHORES

COASTAL



LEGENDS



S

E

T

O

N

Prior appointed to panel

COLLEGE STATION—David Prior, dean of the College of Geosciences at Texas A&M University, has been appointed to the Science Advisory Panel of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy.

“I am pleased to have been asked to join 21 experts from throughout the nation to ensure that the commission receives appropriate scientific advice to help it carry out its mission,” Prior said. “The panel’s advice will underpin the commission’s policy recommendations. I feel honored to be invited to serve with this blue-ribbon group.”

The 16-member U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy was established under the Oceans Act of 2000 to make recommendations for a coordinated and comprehensive national ocean policy. President George W. Bush appointed the first commissioners in July 2001 and their report is to be submitted to the President and the Congress in Spring 2003.

The Oceans Act also mandated creation of a multidisciplinary science advisory panel of experts in the sciences of living and non-living marine resources to assist in preparing the report.

The Commission held a public hearing at Texas A&M in February in conjunction with an international symposium that focused on the Gulf of Mexico. Commissioners were presented with area-specific, Texas-focused perspectives to support the national need for policies and priorities in regard to the oceans.

—Based on University Relations release

Master’s degree approved for Galveston

GALVESTON—The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has approved a master’s degree in marine resources management at Texas A&M University at Galveston (TAMUG).

The program will be offered by the Department of Marine Sciences.

“Our faculty have been working with graduate students for more than 30 years, but this is the first time a TAMUG graduate program is based solely in Galveston,” said Michael Kemp, TAMUG vice president and CEO. “This is another signal regarding the continued academic maturation of TAMUG and is a tribute to the faculty and staff whose efforts have made the degree possible.”

The new non-thesis master’s degree is designed to meet an increasing need for professionals with strong science backgrounds who are also trained in managing coastal and ocean resources. Support for such a program has come from industries, such as the American Bureau of Shipping, government agencies, such as the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

TAMUG administrators and faculty estimate that the program’s first year enrollment will exceed 10 students. Students will study a core set of courses in science, management and environmental law and policy, as well as receive advanced instruction in geographic information systems (GIS) applied to ocean and coastal resources. Courses will be taught by the present faculty at TAMUG supplemented by College Station faculty teaching via the Trans Texas Video Network (TTVN) for distance learning.

TAMUG’s marine sciences program has offered a bachelor of science degree since 1973, graduating a total of 425 students who have gone on to university graduate programs or to jobs with government agencies, environmental laboratories and private corporations, particularly in the ocean sciences and energy sectors.

—Teri Fowle, Texas A&M University at Galveston

3 THE LOOKER, THE WADER AND THE LAWMAKER

"Legend" is a term applied too frequently to sometimes undeserving



people. But legend is the only term that can describe three men who have dedi-



cated their lives to the study and conservation of the marine environment.

Their lives are stories of hard work and determination that convey simple

philosophies.

Spend time with author Jim

Hiney getting to know the looker



— marine biologist Dr. Henry Hildebrand, the wader — oyster biologist Dr. Sammy Ray and the lawmaker — former state senator Babe Schwartz.

29 LETTERS

The Salty Spirits article (Winter 2002) draws a letter to the editor in which the writer objects to some of the depictions of the fishermen.

FRONT COVER — STEPHAN MYERS

TEXAS SHORES is published quarterly by the Texas Sea Grant College Program in an effort to promote a better understanding of the Texas marine environment. Sea Grant is a partnership of university, government and industry focusing on marine research, education and outreach. Nationally, Sea Grant began in 1966 with the passage of the Sea Grant Program and College Act. Patterned after the Land Grant Act of the 1860s, the Sea Grant concept is a broad-based scientific effort to better the world for all those living in and out of the sea.

In 1968, Texas A&M University received the distinction of being named among the nation's first six institutional award recipients. Three years later the school was designated a Sea Grant College. The university has a rich heritage of oceanography research dating back to 1949 when the program began. In addition, there is an ongoing program to get marine information to the public.



Sea Grant is a matching funds program. The Texas Sea Grant College Program itself is made possible through an institutional award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, as well as appropriations from the Texas Legislature and local governments.

TEXAS SHORES STAFF — Jim Hiney, *Editor*; Amy Broussard, *Design*; Eric Graham, *Webmaster*; Jesse Rodriguez, *Distribution*. **SEA GRANT ADMINISTRATION** — Dr. Robert Stickney, *Director*; Amy Broussard, *Associate Director*; Ralph Rayburn, *Associate Director*.

Change of Address, Subscription Information or Other Questions: Texas Shores, Sea Grant College Program, Texas A&M University, 2700 Earl Rudder Freeway South, Suite 1800, College Station, TX 77845. Or call (979) 862-3767. Please include old label when changing mailing address. TEXAS SHORES (ISSN 0747-0959), is published quarterly by the Sea Grant College Program, Texas A&M University, 2700 Earl Rudder Freeway South, Suite 1800, College Station, TX 77845. Subscriptions are free to Texas residents. The cost is \$7.50 per year for out-of-state or foreign addresses. Periodical postage is paid at Bryan, TX and additional locations. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to the Sea Grant College Program, 2700 Earl Rudder Freeway South, Suite 1800, College Station, TX 77845. <http://texas-sea-grant.tamu.edu>.

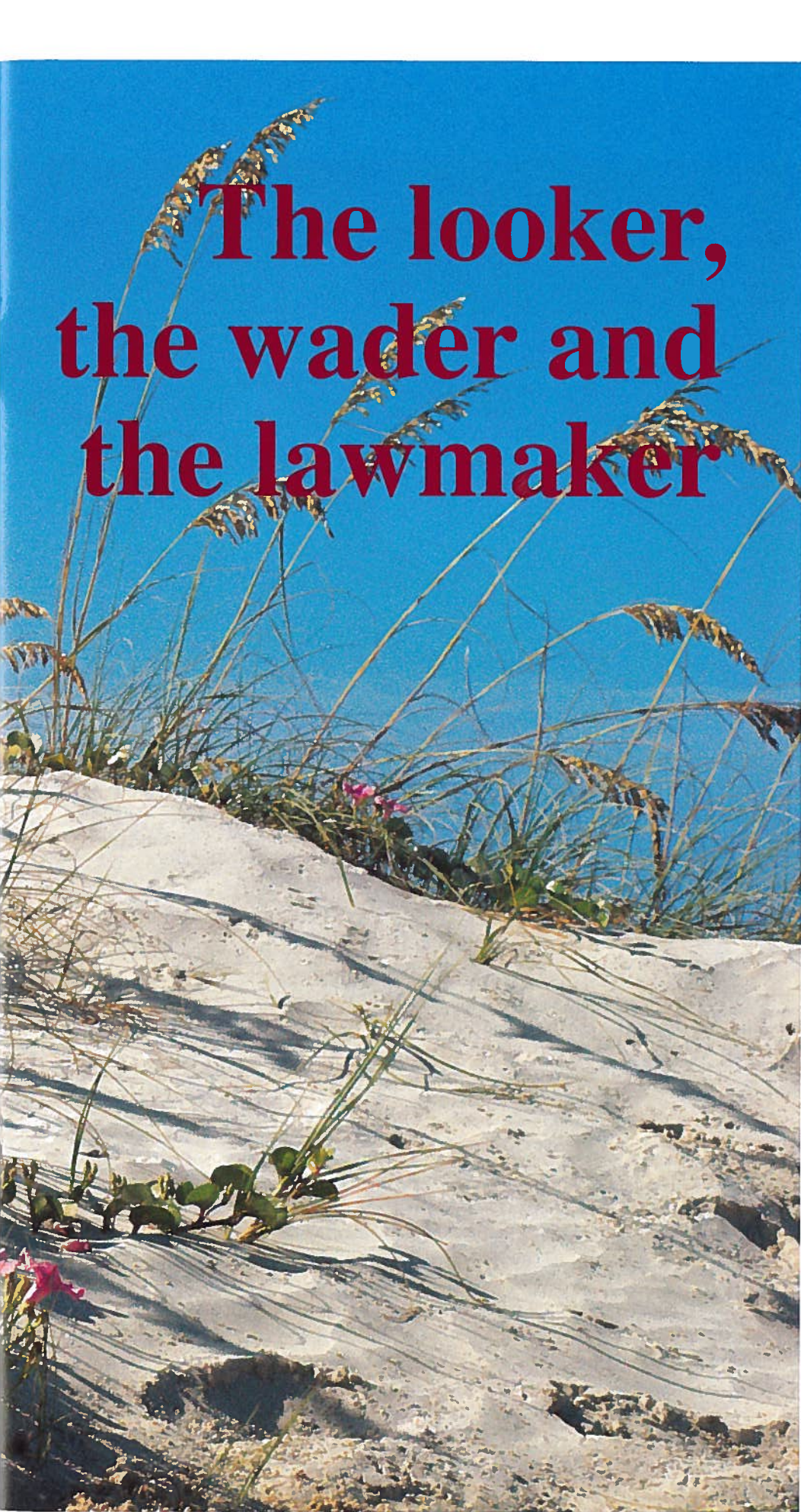
TEXAS SHORES

SPRING 2002

VOL. 35 No. 1

CONTENTS





The looker, the wader and the lawmaker

BY JIM HINEY

To call them “living legends” might be a stretch, but not by much. Legend implies that they are widely known and admired.

For sure they are admired.

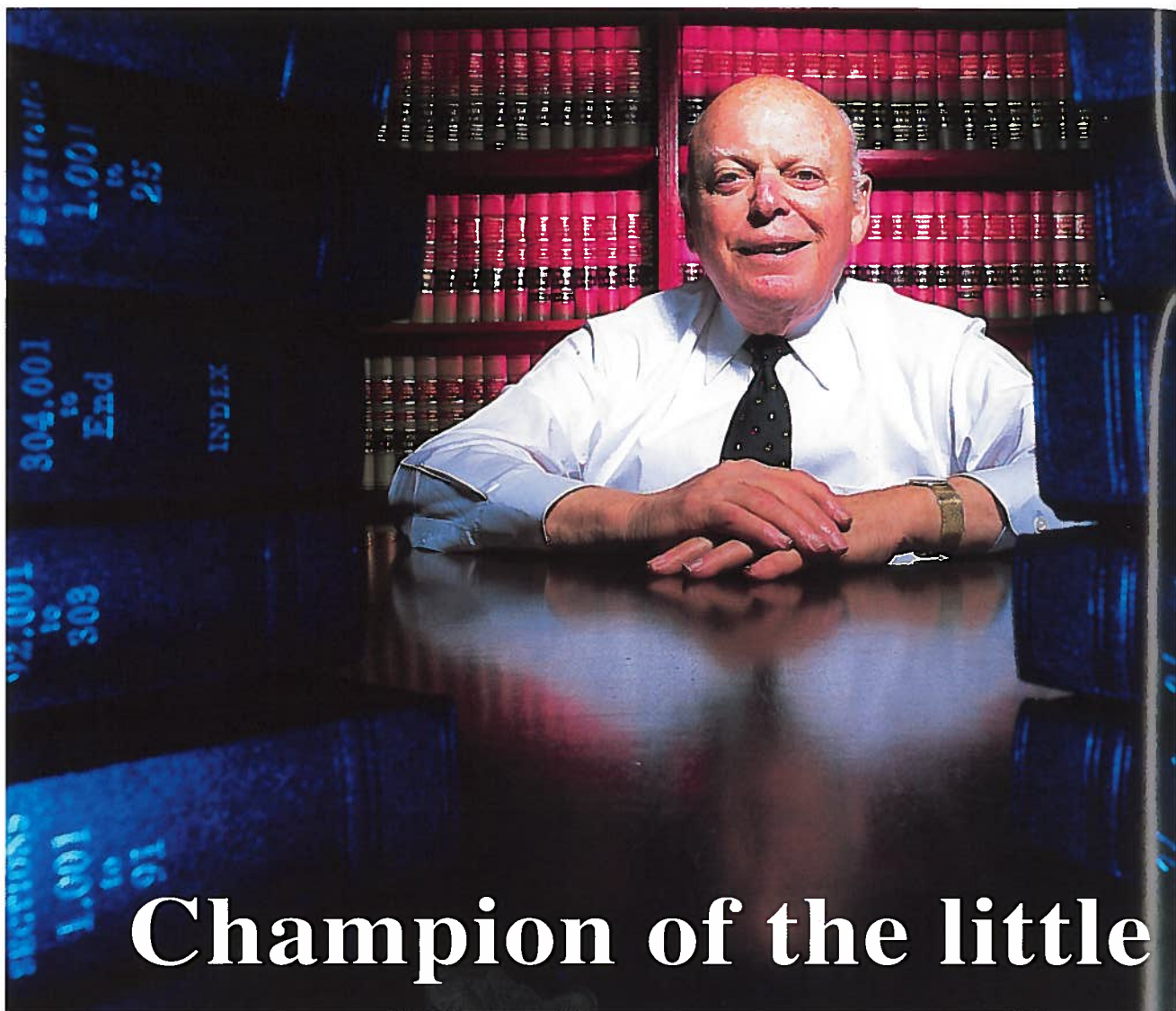
They differ in their level of fame.

But all have dedicated their lives to the study and conservation of the marine environment — and not just in Texas. Their lives are stories of hard work and determination that convey simple philosophies.

There is the looker, marine biologist Dr. Henry Hildebrand, who has taught us not to be afraid to dive into nature and get dirty — it is the only way to find out what is out there.

There is the wader, oyster biologist Dr. Sammy Ray, who has taught us to be open to new ideas — taking the fork in the road can lead to good things.

And there is the lawmaker, former state senator Babe Schwartz, who has taught us that things worth fighting for are worth fighting for well — never give up.



Champion of the little

The books framing Babe contain the coastal legislation that he helped pass during his tenure in the Texas Senate.

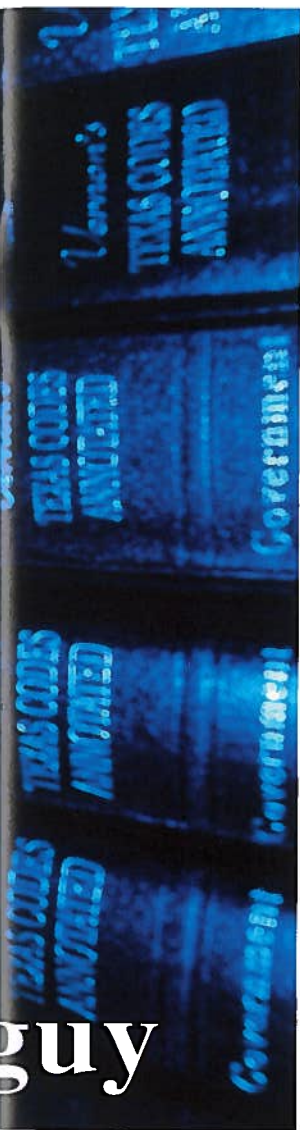
More than 26 years after the fact, the diminutive, white-haired Jewish gentleman with an infectious smile does not remember what prompted him to write the letter. It is clear from the letter itself, dated Nov. 10, 1975, that someone had been wronged in the gentleman's eyes.

A faculty member at the Baylor College of Medicine had questioned an action taken by The University of Texas System Board of Regents, apparently eliciting a letter of reprimand from one of the regents. The nature of the action has been lost with time, as has the letter of reprimand. But the passion for fairness and justice that still drives the gentleman was evident in his letter to the regent, which read in part:

I found your letter astounding in its ignorance of the rights of citizens in a democracy. A member of the Baylor College of Medicine faculty has the same right to question the Board of Regents action in this matter as any other taxpayer in this state, or for that matter, any other citizen in this state.

Your letter is absolute proof of your total incompetence to serve as an appointed member of any board and of your absolute failure to understand the democratic process under which you serve.

The letter is also testimony to another one of



the gentleman's conspicuous character traits — he doesn't mince words.

Ask Texans who remember the 1950s through the 1970s about Aaron Robert Schwartz's contributions to the state and most often they respond with the slightly squinted eyes of a puzzled look. Ask what A.R. Schwartz did for the Texas marine environment and the eyes offer a flicker of recognition.

Ask about "Babe" and stories flow about one of the greatest political friends that the common man and the coast have ever known. His fiery defense of the Baylor College of Medicine faculty member was vintage Schwartz.

"He was a street kid from Galveston with a lot of brains and a whole lot of ethics who fought for the little guy, the average person and he did a very good job of it," says Sharron Stewart, a long-time friend and one time Senate aide to Schwartz. "Babe is a bulldog. He is a champion of the little guy and he is absolutely tenacious, afraid of no one."

Babe Schwartz first walked the halls of the Texas capitol in 1948 as a University of Texas law student working his way through school as a self-labeled grunt for the chief clerk of the Texas House of Representatives.

He ended his career as an elected legislator 32 years later, after serving two terms as a state representative, 21 years as a state senator and passing a body of legislation that became the basis for Texas' coastal management plan.

Along the way he also championed the causes of desegregation, education and mental retardation.

His gift of oratory is legendary. So refined was his speaking skill that if rumor of a Schwartz filibuster spread through the capitol, the House of Representatives would lose its quorum immediately, says Sharron Stewart, now a member of the Galveston Bay Foundation Executive Committee.

"Babe once told me that 'If you can't write your speech on the back of a phone message pad, then you don't know your subject — you shouldn't be speaking,'" she said.

Schwartz was equally adept using an economy of words. When the Texas Senate was considering a bill that Schwartz believed gave too much power to landlords he confronted one of the bill's supporters, legendary black lawmaker Barbara Jordan.

"My people are landlords. Your people are tenants," Schwartz told her. "Now, I can tell my people why I'm against this bill. Can you tell your people why you're for it?"

In another instance, a company that processed menhaden, a species of bait fish, into fish meal applied for a permit in Galveston to operate a processing facility right next door to the Texas A&M University at Galveston campus on Pelican Island. Fish processing plants like that are notoriously smelly. Given its proposed proximity to the campus, Schwartz was certain that the ensuing odor would drive away students and force the university to close.

During the morning hours of a hearing on the permit at the Galveston County Courthouse, company officials touted the state of technology they used to create sealed bags of fish meal like the one they brought to the courthouse that day. They exhorted commissioners and

“He is a bright light in the lives of those ... around him.”

the assembled opposition to “trust us,” a phrase they used repeatedly.

Schwartz was the first speaker after lunch. By that time, he remembers, the exhibited bag of fishmeal had started to cast stinky doubt on the company’s claims. In very brief testimony, Schwartz beat the company bloody with its own “trust us” approach.

“They want us to trust them?” Schwartz remembers saying as he pointed to the fishmeal bag. “Trust your senses.”

Then, invoking the memory of the only space shuttle disaster in the nation’s history and the rubber seal that caused it, Schwartz said simply, “The Challenger astronauts trusted Morton-Thiokol,” and then he sat down as a collective gasp passed through the audience.

The company withdrew its application.

“There is an aftermath to this story,” Schwartz says, flashing an I-told-you-so grin. “The company finally won a location in Brazoria County, down on the bay side, as I recall, near the ship channel or the Intracoastal Waterway. They had to cancel a Friday night football game in Angleton because of the smell, and it was like 15 miles from the menhaden plant to the stadium.”

Not long after that, the company closed the plant for good.

It was one of many fights that Schwartz has waged during the past 50 years against interests that he believed were contrary to the public good. And, as in so many of those other fights, the plucky kid who grew up on the beaches of a coastal vacation spot won.

“One of the things Babe taught me early on was, ‘You can’t prove air pollution. It may be the air that is making you sick. But, but you can prove water pollution with a grab sample,’” says Stewart. “‘Go after them where you can prove they are doing damage.’”

“He is a bright light in the lives of those of us around him,” she continues. “When things seem impossible, there’s Babe out fighting another fight.”

Aaron Robert “Babe” Schwartz was born in Galveston in July 1926, the second son of Russian immigrants. His maternal grandfather had joined the wave of Russian Jews who immigrated to the United States shortly before World War I.

Thousands of Russian Jews entered the United States through ports around the country, including New Orleans and Galveston. The influx through the south

included what would eventually become prominent Houston merchant families, like the Zales and Gordons of jewelry fame, and the founders of the Sakowitz department store chain.

Schwartz’s grandfather entered the country through New Orleans and followed fellow immigrants to Texas, where he eventually settled in Galveston.

“He had intended to send for my grandmother and my mother and her sister but he couldn’t do it during World War I,” says Schwartz. “He was here for five years by himself earning enough money to get his family over here.”

He did so by doing odd jobs. At one point Schwartz’s grandfather moved to Chicago, but he quickly moved back. “He said it was colder than Russia,” Schwartz recalls.

Schwartz’s grandfather sent for the rest of the family after the war ended. He continued to make and save money until his daughters were old enough to become naturalized. Once the girls became American citizens, he did what any old-world father would do. “He decided to send for two husbands for them. He had enough money to do it by then so he sent back to the old country for a pair of husbands for his daughters,” Schwartz says.

In total Schwartz’s grandfather sent for three men. One was to be the groom for another woman in Galveston’s Jewish community.

The men met the women in Havana, Cuba.

“I think the three of them came down the gangway and whichever woman was first in line, second in line and third in line became that man’s wife,” Schwartz says, tapping the side of his head with his finger as he recalls the story. “Cuba was the country of choice then for an immigrant to come to and marry an American. They could get into the United States as soon as the American wife had a baby who was an American citizen. By that ruse my father was able to emigrate because he became the parent of an American citizen. He married my mother, sight unseen.”

Nine months later, Louis Schwartz was born, guaranteeing his father entry to the United States. Babe’s birth followed 18 months later. When he was six weeks old his aunt pinned a label on him that has remained, little changed, for almost 76 years. She began calling him “Baby” because he was the youngest member of the family. The name

stuck and soon friends and family dropped references to Aaron. He was, simply, Baby Schwartz.

A nickname like Baby may be cute for an infant and tolerable for a toddler, but the 14-year-old Baby Schwartz finally rebelled against his name.

“I threw a temper tantrum, as I like to remember it, about being called Baby when I was grown up,” Schwartz smiles broadly. “So, my family quit calling me Baby and started calling me Babe. It wasn’t much of a concession.”

Schwartz’s parents divorced when he was 7. The two boys lived with their mother, who spoke enough English to converse when she needed to, but not enough to get a job outside of her home. For the most part she spoke Yiddish, a language that Schwartz never fully learned to speak. He found that knowing some basic words was all he needed at home.

“When you were getting commands from your mother in Yiddish, you knew what they meant,” he says chuckling.

Babe’s father, on the other hand, was a prominent local clothier and spoke English well, albeit with a heavy East European accent.

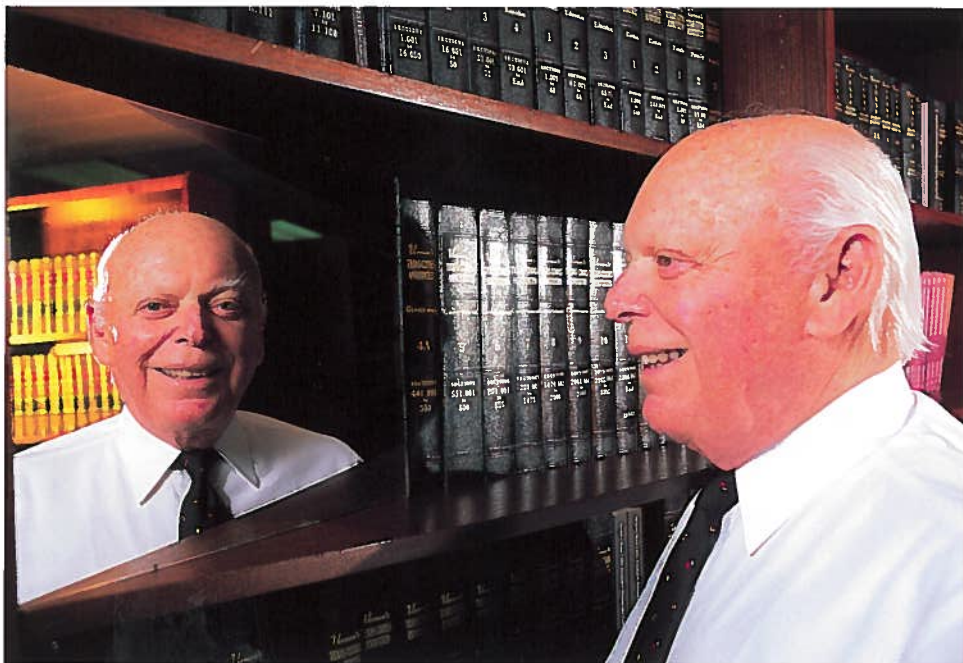
Babe landed his first summer job at 11, talking Ma Silvernail into letting him rent floats, umbrellas and beach chairs at a spot on Murdochs Pier, overlooking the Gulf of Mexico at what is now the intersection of 23rd Street and Seawall Blvd.

His summer mornings began with an open ocean swim that paralleled about 10 blocks of Seawall Blvd., from 23rd Street to the 14th Street fishing pier, and back again. It was a daily ritual he completed with Leroy Columbo, Galveston’s legendary deaf mute lifeguard.

“I was attracted to the fact that I could make some money and I could also stay on the beach all day long and not have to be anywhere else,” Schwartz says.

Before he graduated from high school, Schwartz had “every imaginable kind of job. My motivation there was to earn money, but it wasn’t pocket money for me. My brother also had odd jobs but I probably pursued more odd jobs than he did because I really enjoyed it.”

At one time or another throughout his teen years, Schwartz rolled greens on a miniature



As the mirror reflects his image, much of Texas’ coastal law reflects Babe Schwartz’s years of service.

golf course, had morning and afternoon newspaper routes, was a bellhop at the Jean Lafitte Hotel in downtown Galveston after school let out each day and was a bellhop at the Buccaneer Hotel on the beach during the summers

“If I wasn’t working, I’d go hustle a job,” he remembers.

For one summer, Babe was a lifeguard at Stewart Beach. His open ocean swimming skills fully qualified Babe to be a lifeguard, but he admits that he landed the job because many of Galveston’s young men were fighting World War II.

“Anyone who could put on a Frank Buck helmet and a whistle around their neck could be a lifeguard,” he says.

The war also put an end to any chance Schwartz had to know his father’s family or his mother’s family, outside of his grandparents and aunt.

“Not one relative from my father’s family ever came over after him,” Schwartz says with a hint of disappointment in his voice. “According to my father, there may have been 39 or 40 members of his family in Europe when World War II broke out and they were all killed by the Nazis. No relative of my grandfather’s ever surfaced after World War II. Our entire European family was decimated, completely eliminated as a result of the Holocaust and whatever other fates of the war befell them.”

After high school, Babe headed for Texas A&M University, where his brother was already a student, intent on becoming an engineer. Babe stayed in school for two semesters, during which a realization slowly began creeping into his mind.

“At Texas A&M the track we ran every day was a mile and six-tenths. I don’t know why we didn’t run two miles or one mile or five miles,” he recalls. “Calisthenics were an hour, the obstacle course was a half-hour, drill was about an hour and military science and tactics was an hour. Then there were forced marches and other things like that.

“I began to realize that there was a reason we were having these forced marches and running the obstacle course and carrying a 40-pound pack and going to the firing range. It occurred to me that this was serious crap,” he says, exhibiting some of the colorful language that permeates his oratory. “These people were going to make a damn infantry lieutenant out of me and I was going to lead men into battle. About that time the azure blue seas of the Pacific looked better from a ship. I decided to be a seaman first class.”

He enlisted in the U.S. Navy, a decision that “had something to do with sleeping in a dry bed each night,” he jests. He went through aviation ordinance school in Oklahoma, where he learned to arm airplanes, and then to a base in Thermal, Calif., just 26 miles from Palm Springs. “At that time I could have bought Palm Springs for a week’s pay,” he jokes.

Babe and his buddies received orders in early August 1945 to board the aircraft carrier *USS Bennington*. It was later rumored that the *USS Bennington* was to have been Adm. Chester Nimitz’s flagship during the invasion of Japan. But as Babe and the other sailors were preparing to board the ship on Aug. 6, 1945, they received news that an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Three days later another atomic bomb devastated Nagasaki.

For all intents and purposes, the shooting war was over and Babe had missed out on the action. Time tempers judgment, and looking back on history he praises President Harry Truman for having the courage to use the atom bomb, which he believes ended the war sooner rather than later and saved hundreds of thousands of American lives. Numerous television documentaries later, Babe says he has learned that the Japanese

had about 1,000 Kamikaze pilots in reserve with orders to target American aircraft carriers participating in the invasion.

“I don’t think there would have been a carrier afloat after the invasion,” he believes. “So my choice to join the Navy looks worse all of the time, but it still may look better than being part of a landing party in Japan. So all of those people who think the war ended improperly because of the atom bomb can all go to hell in my book.”

If he gained nothing else from his military experience, Babe left the Navy with a fascination of lawyers. He had befriended a U.S. Marine Corps lawyer who plied part of his trade as appointed counsel aboard ship representing Babe and his Navy buddies when they got into trouble. After he was discharged from the Navy in 1946, he went back to Texas A&M and switched his studies from engineering to pre-law. The change of focus was for the best because “I found out from the engineering professors and my grades that I was not going to be an engineering student,” he laughs.

While at Texas A&M, Babe took a military contract with the U.S. Air Force. He attended Officers Candidate School and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Air Force Reserve. He also accumulated enough credits to enter The University of Texas Law School in 1948.

“One of the first thing I did in law school was get me a job in the Capitol, Schwartz says. “I walked out on the steps of the law school one day and looked at the Capitol and I asked somebody, ‘Do you think they have any jobs down there?’ This guy said, ‘Yeah, but you had better know a politician.’ I didn’t know any politicians but it looked easy, so I talked myself into a job in the House of Representatives. I loved it.”

The job was working for the chief clerk of the Texas House of Representatives performing “absolute menial grunt work. Then I began to write memorial resolutions and deliver messages to the Senate, which required my presence by stepping up to the bar of the Senate, being introduced by the door keeper, who would say, ‘Mr. President, a message from the House.’ I would step forward and say, ‘Mr. President, I am directed by the House to inform the Senate that the House has passed the following bills and resolutions,’ and then I’d start reading the bill numbers. Then Sen. George

Parkhouse would yell, 'Don't read the damn numbers.' I would say, 'Yes sir,' and I would send up the message," Schwartz says, laughing deeply. "It was great experience. Those were my first speeches in the Senate."

He worked for the chief clerk during the 1949 legislative session and he worked for the newly created Legislative Council during the 1951 session, which sandwiched a failed bid for election to the Texas House in 1950. While in law school, Babe began courting an attractive, intelligent University of Texas undergraduate student, Marilyn Cohn of Harlingen.

When he graduated from law school in 1951, Babe made what he considers the best decision of his life. He married the woman who many consider his social conscience and every bit his intellectual equal.

"As brilliant and smart as Babe is, Marilyn is his equal or more," believes Stewart. "They are a real partnership in life."

For the next three years Babe worked as a prosecutor in the Galveston County Attorney's office, eventually prosecuting most of the county's capital murder cases during that time. But public service still beckoned, and in 1954 he won his first elected state seat as a staunchly Democratic representative from Galveston. He won a second House term in 1956. Those two elections threw him squarely into two of the most controversial sessions — 1955 and 1957 — he ever experienced.

"Out of the clear blue sky I became the resident radical liberal as a member of the House because of the segregation issues of that period," he says with a tone of surprise even today. "I didn't know I was a liberal, I didn't know that I was a radical, but I showed up at the House and the House was crazy with bigotry and the worst kind of hatred, and it was all over Brown vs. The Board of Education. It was all over the integration of the school systems."

Brown vs. The Board of Education was a 1954 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that the "the separate but equal" racial doctrine prevalent in the United States at that time was not equal when it came to education. There was no reason, the justices ruled, to separate school students based solely on race. The decision reached far beyond education, affecting every aspect of race relations.

The 1955 and 1957 Texas Legislative sessions were consumed with segregation



Babe was first sworn in as a Senator in January 1960 following a special election. Lt. Gov. Ben Ramsey (center, in hat) traveled to Galveston for the swearing in, accompanied by Senator Bob Baker from Houston. Babe took them to Sea Isle (at Galveston's west end) where a developer had erected these posts in an ongoing battle over the concept of open beaches.

issues, and consequently with proposed segregationist legislation. "Every nut who had ever come out from underneath a rock somewhere seemed to me to be in the Legislature at that time," recalls Schwartz. "I hated them. I had some very good friends there from my working days of 1949 and 1951, but all of a sudden all of these people turned into raging maniacs, I couldn't understand it. But they were all politicians who were being re-elected on segregation issues. Segregation became the battle cry of every public official in Texas. The most votes we ever got in the house, amongst 150 members, against any of that racist legislation was 40 votes. I didn't have much time to be an environmentalist in 1955 and 1957."

Schwartz lost his first bid for the Texas Senate in 1958, but he got a second shot when Sen. Jimmy Phillips resigned in 1959. Babe won a special election in 1960 to fill Phillip's unexpired term. He held the seat for the next 21 years.

His crusades for the environment and the common man garnered him much recognition. In a February 1964 *Houston Chronicle* article, Babe was one of eight Senators and Representatives dubbed "a new breed of Texas Legislator, just as there is a new breed



The dedication of the oceanography/meteorology building at Texas A&M University in 1973 was highlighted by appearances by the late Jacques Cousteau (left) and by Senator Babe Schwartz (center).

of Texan — original thinker, ingenious, ambitious, vibrantly seeking the best for himself and others, a man with a social conscience.”

The article said Babe, a 37-year-old second term senator, “has established himself as an outspoken critic of closed-door Senate maneuvers.

“Schwartz was nearly censured for threatening to defy the 58th Legislature’s Senate rules. He took a strong stand for the public’s right to know the vote by which the Senate refused to consent to one of Gov. John Connally’s appointments.

“The Gulf coast legislator has taken equally firm stands on issues that pang his social conscience — especially mental retardation and education.”

Equally as impressive, *Texas Monthly* magazine named him one of the state’s 10 best legislators following legislative sessions every two years from the list’s inception in 1973 until Babe’s last session in 1979.

The segregation issues of the 1955 and 1957 sessions may have given Babe little time to be an environmentalist, but he made up for it after he became a

senator. He had already missed helping legendary Texas Representative, and later Congressman, Bob Eckardt of Houston pass the Open Beaches Act of 1959, widely considered the first of many bills that became the basis of the state’s coastal management plan.

The law codified the result of an oil company lawsuit over the dividing line between public and private property in Texas. In what is known as the “Luttes case,” the court essentially ruled that the land is public property from the mean high tide line toward the water.

Babe spent the rest of his political career protecting that law, particularly the section that says the public must have “free and unrestricted access” to Texas beaches. One of his first beach protection bills made it a misdemeanor for anyone to post a sign reading “Private beach” on a public beach. “People still laugh about that one,” Schwartz says, grinning.

He sponsored a constitutional amendment to the Open Beaches Act that gave counties the right to regulate traffic on beaches. He sponsored other measures that banned littering on beaches, recog-

nized the importance of freshwater inflows into the state’s bays and estuaries and sought to protect them; a similar bill protected wetlands. A Schwartz-led bill in 1971 resulted in creation of the Windstorm Catastrophic Insurance Pool, which made windstorm insurance available to residents in the first tier of coastal counties. The so-called “Cat Pool” brought about stronger coastal building codes as well.

Babe pushed for a law that would require coastal property buyers to sign a notice acknowledging that coastal hazards like hurricanes could erode the shoreline enough that houses once on private property might end up on a public beach and have to be removed. He had to wait until 1986 to see the coastal hazard notice law pass.

Texas landowners have a reputation for fiercely protecting their property rights against government. Texans privately own about 97 percent of the state’s 171 million acres and they rail at the government telling them what they can and cannot do on their own land. Schwartz’s legislation flew in the face of those seeking freedom from government regulations. He felt the public’s right to free and unrestricted access to Texas beaches outweighed the rights of often wealthy and influential people to claim exclusive rights to their piece of sandy heaven.

That stand is bold enough for a legislator from a landlocked district in the heart of Texas, but when those very same landowners have the power to vote you out of office ...

“To actually codify those laws at the same time that you represent a coastal area is amazing,” says former Texas Land Commissioner Garry Mauro. “That took a lot of courage and there wasn’t a lot of constituency to keep those beaches open and public. There was a very entrenched constituency that didn’t want that to happen. You are basically telling all of the beach owners in your district who are property taxpayers and who think they own a beach house that they don’t actually

own a beach house, they own a house and property to the vegetation line. Anyone who wants to can put a blanket in front of your beach house and the beach is as much theirs as it is yours.”

Schwartz believes his constituents continued to elect him because of the general impression that “as irascible and overbearing and arrogant as I could be about my opinions on coastal matters, my motivation was basically for what was in the best interest of the public. I never was out there trying to get anything personally or privately. None of these positions I take have anything to do with anything that I might want for myself. What I wanted was for everybody else to have the same freedom and access to the beaches that I had all of my life.”

Schwartz says he fights for the coastal environment because he has a love for the area that grew out of a childhood spent as a beach bum, surfer and fisherman. “There is a natural affection that will come to you if you are street savvy and live on Galveston Island,” he says. “If you don’t develop a love of the beach, you must be sick or puny.”

He was also willing to listen to experts about how all parts of an ecosystem work to produce balance, how humans can disrupt that balance and what needed to be done to protect the environment.

The total ecosystem approach was something Schwartz learned from Ed Harte, long-time publisher of the Corpus Christi Caller-Times and partner in the Harte-Hanks media company, who has a long history of supporting environmental causes.

Harte testified in front of an interim beach study committee put together by Schwartz. Harte was “just beautiful,” Schwartz recalls. “He pointed out that our vision was seriously limited. The



Schwartz holds forth with fellow legislators; (from left) former state Senator and later Congressman Craig Washington, Senator Rodney Ellis, Schwartz and former state Senator Chet Brooks.

beaches were just part of the total coastal environment and that beaches were a very small part of that environment. He said beaches were important but the dunes and the structure of barrier islands and peninsulas, and the marshes and the wetlands and the bays and the shoreline of the mainland and the coastal plain were all a necessary part of that environment. To talk about beaches was to eliminate the concerns about everything else that impacted the coastal environment and habitats.

“He was talking about everything from the ocean to the coastal plain. Hell, he had us halfway up the Brazos and Colorado rivers talking about all of these wonderful things that happen if you improve all of these conditions.”

From that time on, Babe called his interim committees “Coastal Study” committees.

Rachel Carson is credited with starting the country’s environmental movement in 1962 when she published her landmark book, *Silent Spring*, about how the pesticide DDT was causing huge bird kills. Individual Americans were quick to take up the call to protect the environment, but government moves slower than the constituency it represents.

So it is remarkable that Babe Schwartz was preaching “green” legislation when environmentalism had

yet to take hold in the halls of government. Even if Schwartz were serving in the Legislature today, his passion for environmental legislation would still be the exception rather than the rule, Mauro believes.

“In today’s world there are a lot of politicians who give ‘green’ lip service but whose actions are totally committed to those who are for the status quo, which is in fact polluting and not protecting the resource base,” he says. “Babe not only gave lip

service, he backed it up with his votes and his legislation.”

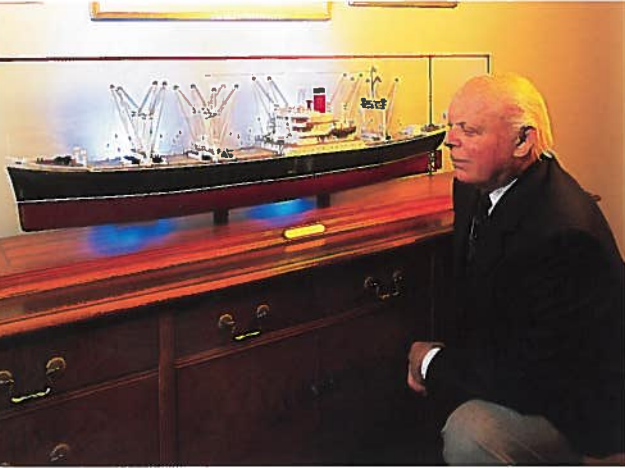
Even more amazing, Schwartz convinced his contemporaries that voting for his legislation was a good idea.

“Babe was very good at putting together coalitions and convincing people of the rightness of the cause,” Mauro observes “I’ve always said that anybody who has a real understanding of Texas and Texans knows that Texans have always loved their beaches, even if they live in Amarillo. It seems to me that even though they might not go to the beaches more than once every five years, that one trip to the beach and that one ability to have a public beach appeals to the egalitarian streak and independence that you find in Texans.”

Not that the legislation was always an easy sell. Mauro says his favorite memories of Schwartz are of the 5-foot 6-inch senator approaching much larger legislators about proposed laws that Schwartz felt would benefit the public good. Babe began by gently cajoling his larger counterparts to see his point of view. The encounters often ended with “Babe standing in their face with his finger tapping their chest explaining how the cow ate the cabbage and what they needed to do was to vote for the people,” says Mauro.

The body of Schwartz’s legislation

became the foundation of the coastal management program first developed by Bob Armstrong, Mauro's predecessor as Texas Land Commissioner. But Armstrong never found a governor willing to submit the program for certification so that it could be approved by the federal government.



Schwartz built half of this model before demands on his time intervened and he had to call on help.

Mauro took office with a fierce determination to see the coastal management program become a reality. He, too, used the same collection of existing legislation dominated by Schwartz-sponsored bills to build his program. Mauro also found two successive governors in Ann Richards and George W. Bush who were willing to certify the program. Finally approved by the federal government in January 1997, Texas'

coastal management plan gives the state the ability to require federal agencies to coordinate their policies with state agencies to protect the Texas coast for future generations.

It also provides federal funds to help with coastal issues such as wetland acquisition and erosion protection

Without Babe Schwartz in the Legislature, "There would be a whole body of public law that protects ordinary people against big corporate interest that wouldn't be in place," Mauro believes. "But more particularly, we wouldn't have open public access to beaches and we wouldn't have a coastal management plan. We would have lots of beach houses with private beaches and a lot less public access and a lot less protection of our natural resource base."

The Ronald Reagan revolution of 1980 helped sweep many Democrats out of office across the nation, including Schwartz. Since losing his final re-election bid, Babe has been a lobbyist for a variety of interests that pay him for his legislative expertise. He also donates time lobbying for environmental causes, particularly those involving the state's bays and estuaries.

The words "honesty" and "integrity" are not usually the first words that come to mind when talking about politicians or lobbyists,

let alone someone who has been both. Babe Schwartz is not usual.

"In most people's view it is impossible to be a politician and a lobbyist and still be honorable, but Babe Schwartz has done it," says Stewart.

Now almost 76, Babe's energy and enthusiasm are as infectious as ever. He shows no noticeable impairment from strokes he suffered in 1985 and 1986, or by an operation that removed a tumor and part of his brain. His intellect remains intact, his smile is broad and ever present and his sense of humor is self-evident when anyone asks him how he is doing.

"My doctor said I didn't have enough of my brain to practice law," he claims, "but it was all right to lobby."

Schwartz spends part of his time as an adjunct professor at the University of Houston Law School, teaching a course in coastal management and ocean law. Asked if he would change anything in his life if he could, Marilyn beats him to the punch.

"He'd be taller," she says as her husband laughs deeply. "He has always wanted to be as tall as me."

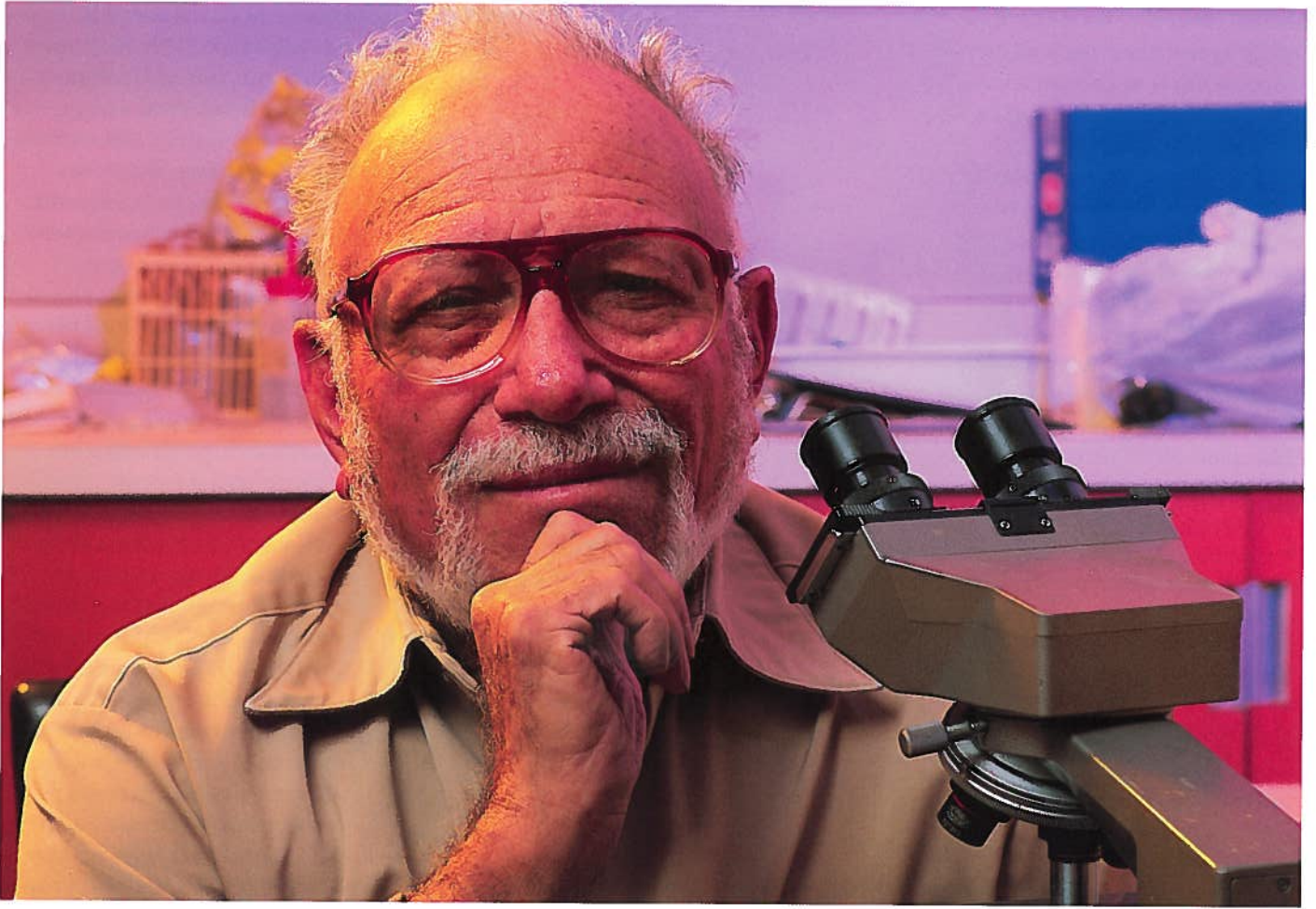
The one thing Schwartz might have done differently is entering the classroom as a law professor earlier than his 70th birthday. As much as he loved being a legislator, Babe believes he may have left the Senate earlier than his 1980 defeat if he had thought about and gotten a job teaching law.

Teaching his class now gives him a chance to "draw together all of my experiences of a whole lifetime in this coastal management program area and talk about it in class and deliver that part of me that is enthusiastic about what I think these young people ought to be enthusiastic about."

Mauro had a favorite slogan when he was Texas Land Commissioner that he believes sums up Schwartz's lifelong pursuit. "I said I want to protect Texas beaches for all time for all Texans. Babe Schwartz lived that slogan."

Mauro pauses briefly and then, making reference to the high ceilings and tall doors in the Texas capitol, recalled Bob Ekhardt's observation that the seat of Texas government "was built for giants but inhabited by pygmies."

"In Babe Schwartz, this diminutive man, you had a giant," Mauro says. "He filled the building."



"Papa Smurf," "The Turtle" or the "Ping Pong King" — by whatever name Sammy Ray is one of Texas' most unique icons.

On a wing and a shell

On any given day, the site that greets visitors to this roomy, partially cluttered office/laboratory is often the same: A khaki-clad figure bent over a microscope, his fingers nimbly spinning dials with practiced speed, scanning a slide mount back and forth, from top to bottom.

Dr. Sammy Ray is looking for an old acquaintance among the oyster tissue taken from Redfish Reef in Galveston Bay. The parasite *Perkinsus marinus*, known by most as "dermo" can decimate an oyster crop. Its only control is Mother Nature. Dermo thrives in warm temperatures and salty water.

Every month Ray examines samples sent to him from six public reefs and three private oyster leases. While he can't control dermo, he can keep track of its abundance from reef to reef. The self-professed computer illiterate takes the data he collects and posts in on a Web site, so those interested in the parasite or oysters in general can follow dermo's history in a particular spot.

While not particularly fond of dermo (he would not mind seeing it disappear for good), Ray has dermo to credit for his career as one of the foremost oyster experts in the world. The technique he developed to test for dermo 50 years

ago is still used today with few changes to the protocol.

Name the last scientific advancement that lasted 50 years in its original form.

Finishing his examination, Ray announces that 40 percent of the Redfish Reef samples are infected, which is not unusual for that reef in late winter, when the samples were taken. He gives the data to a student worker so she can enter them into the computer. The worker is one of untold thousands who have and will pass through Texas A&M University at Galveston (TAMUG) and be touched by Sammy.

As she walks away, Ray slips an

unusual cover over his microscope. He readily agrees that using a plastic shopping bag is an unconventional, yet inexpensive, alternative to buying an actual microscope cover.

“Everything I do is inexpensive,” he says with the grin of a miser who just found spare change in his neighbor’s couch. “Part of my philosophy is that you can do a lot with a little. Too many people waste money.”

Ray is very much a product of the Great Depression and it shows in his frugality and work ethic, although his hurried pace is more the result of an overabundance of energy than the need to work.

“I grew up never having enough to do to take care of the energy that I have,” he admits. “I still have trouble with it. If I’m going to watch a football game, that is not all I am going to do. I’m also going to read something, chop up things to make a salad or I’m going to shell pecans. I just can’t sit and do nothing else. I never want to be entertained. I like music as a background, but unless my wife is performing I do not want to go to a concert and just sit there and listen to the music. I think just being entertained is a waste of time. That’s just part of my makeup.”

If a university can have a heart and soul, then TAMUG’s is Sammy Ray. He was there when the Galveston Marine Laboratory became TAMUG and he has served in virtually every capacity, from janitor to interim president.

Along the way he gained the title professor emeritus of marine biology.

It would be easy to pigeonhole Ray as simply Dr. Oyster. His body of work with the tasty mollusk, particularly in the area of dermo, gained him induction into the Texas Science Hall of Fame in January 2002. He has made trips to India and Mexico to study their oyster industries and offer improvements. If you want to know anything about oysters, you seek out the man who bills himself as “the world’s best Arab oyster specialist.”

But saying that Ray is just an oyster specialist is akin to labeling Babe Schwartz as just a politician.

Big events shaped Ray’s life and altered the course of his career. Before World War II he had set his sights on being a museum curator. He was originally trained as an ornithologist and taxidermist, two interests that he pursues today. Most of the time, visitors to his office at TAMUG’s Fort Crocket campus will find various species of



Dr. Sammy teaches all ages during his Sea Camp sessions.

birds at different stages of being stuffed and preserved.

More than 700 of his stuffed birds, or bird skins, are on exhibit in a museum in Jackson, Miss. and several hundred more are on display at the Smithsonian Institution — some are the only representatives of their respective species in the Smithsonian’s collection.

Ray credits the arsenic he used to preserve the skins beginning more than 60 years ago with helping him reach a well-preserved 83 years of age.

After World War II, Ray determined that he was going to medical school, but dermo sidetracked him and turned what was supposed to be a six-month job into a Hall of Fame career.

Ray is still considered one of the best field biologists of his generation. Until his knees weakened with age, it was common knowledge that one did not challenge the man to a game of ping-pong, although scores of students learned much more than a game while being beaten by him.

“We’d play almost every night and

sometimes we’d play in the early morning,” recalls Dr. Larry McKinney, one of Ray’s former students, who characterized his mentor as a ping-pong terror. “I probably learned more science or had more interesting discussions about biology playing ping-pong with Sammy and that crew than at any other time in my life.”

Ray is a visual oxymoron. A scientist of his renown and stature should have ... well ... stature. But at little taller than 5 feet 4 inches, oyster reefs are about the only things that Ray towers above. He refuses to own a laboratory coat, white or otherwise. Instead he prefers the comfort and affordability of khaki pants and a button front shirt — either khaki or powder blue.

His fondness for wearing blue shirts combined with his trademark white beard has led him to be dubbed “Papa Smurf” by his Sea Camp students. “If you saw him on the water, you’d think he was an oysterman, not a scientist,” says McKinney, senior

director of water policy and director of the Resource Protection Division with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).

The beard itself speaks volumes about Ray’s character. It is a 30-year protest that exemplifies his resolve, his independence and, quite frankly, his stubborn nature. It is fuzzy proof that the easiest way to get Ray to do anything is to tell him that he can’t do it.

“In the early 1970s I went to Mexico to a very primitive area where there was no water or ponds, no refrigerators and no electricity. You had to haul the ice in,” Rays says. “I decided that I wasn’t going to shave. I had a week’s beard when I came home and my wife said she liked it. The next day I ran into TAMUG’s president, who tells me I have to shave the beard. I said, ‘No, I’m not shaving this beard. My wife likes it. She says it makes her think she’s sleeping with Ernest Hemingway.’

“Had he not said that to me, the beard would have come off the next day,” Ray says in a whisper while

leaning forward, as if he is still trying to keep the secret from the president. “But I thought, ‘If I shave my beard, I’m letting him know that I am knuckling under to him.’”

Ask anyone who knows him and they will tell you there is absolutely no knuckle under in Sammy Ray.

Perhaps his greatest contribution to science, and the world for that matter, is in the form of the students and scientists who have studied under him, participated in his much respected Sea Camps or relied on Ray for help.

“You can hardly find anyone in Texas in the field of marine biology who Sammy did not have an effect on,” says McKinney.

McKinney was one of those students. As a Texas A&M junior biology major, McKinney traveled to the Galveston Marine Lab in 1968 for a summer of classes with Ray. “That’s when I decided to become a marine biologist,” McKinney recalls. “He gave me my first job in marine science as a student. It was something Sammy did a lot to get kids money so they could go to school. Sammy was always finding money for students he thought he’d like to have there or thought might have some potential. We cleaned up and did odds and ends. Hundreds of budding biologists probably got their start and the ability to go on because Sammy would scrounge around and find some money or a job or a grant to carry them on so they could go to school.”

A little more than a decade later, Ray the mentor and Ray the friend became Ray the savior to McKinney. The year was 1980 and McKinney had recently received his doctorate. He accepted a project charting oyster reefs in Calcasieu Lake, near Lake Charles, La. McKinney asked Ray to accompany him on the project.

“Of course, I knew everything then,” McKinney laughs about it now. “I convinced Sammy that there was a new technology out called side-scan sonar that we ought to use to chart these oyster reefs. We could get it done in no time. We would hire this guy who had convinced me he could do it and we would run the side-scan and the oyster



then ...

The 1960s-era Sammy Ray (left) tests an anti-fungal agent to learn if it can safely kill dermo. He moves to an oyster reef on the west end of Galveston Island, near Sportsman’s Road, to conduct research in 2002 (below).

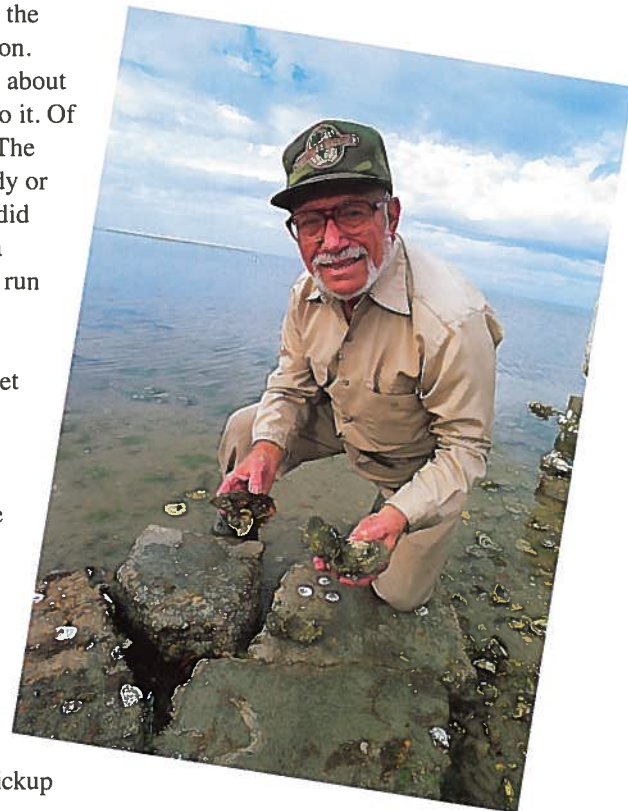
reefs would show up and we could plot them off and be done with the project, get our money and go on.

“Sammy was very skeptical about it but he let me go ahead and do it. Of course, it was an utter failure. The water was too shallow or muddy or something, so the sonar never did work. I was sitting there with a project that Sammy had let me run and I was not going to get a product and I already had the money and we were going to get into a mess.

“We were at the National Wildlife Federation place in Calcasieu and I was sitting there looking pretty glum because I had just sent this guy packing because the sonar wasn’t working after several weeks of trying to make it work. Sammy pulled me aside and said, ‘Larry, I’ll be back in a little while.’ He hopped in the pickup truck and drove off.

“About three hours later he came back with a pickup truck full of 10 foot long 1x2s. We started loading those in the boats and we spent several days in the water getting our feet cut up and we walked most of Calcasieu Lake until we

and now



‘...here is this little guy up to his elbows in rubber gloves to welcome me aboard down there’

stumbled into an oyster reef. We started poking those 1x2s into the edges of that oyster reef until we surrounded all of the oyster reefs with 1x2s. It looked like a forest of 1x2s out there.

“Sammy stuck with me for all of those days to get that project done and mapped. He basically saved my bacon. He never got after me about my decision on that project. We just went and got it done and went on. That was Sammy.”

Through Ray’s help, another student believes he avoided a career as an elite U.S. Navy SEAL, a job with questionable longevity during the Vietnam War. Looking back 27 years later, retired Cmdr. Alan Bunn is still amazed at the risks Ray took to implement a marine science curriculum at TAMUG. Bunn was the program’s first, and only, graduate in December 1974.

“He and I put together an undergraduate marine science program which pretty well followed the guidelines of an undergraduate degree in marine biology that Henry Hildebrand had and was teaching at the University of Corpus Christi, which is now Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi,” Bunn says. “Thank goodness Sammy took it in his arms. He became a champion of the cause. He met a lot of resistance, even though the curriculum was there, the guidelines seemed to be appropriate and the few folks who were in oceanography there seemed to go along with the idea. But there were many in the administration who felt that there was no need for an undergraduate degree in marine science.”

Bunn was a kid from Fort Worth who gained a love of the coast and marine environment from many family vacations spent in Galveston and Corpus Christi. He had spent a year studying marine biology under famed marine scientist Henry Hildebrand at the University of Corpus Christi, but the cost of attending what was then a private school was more than Bunn could afford.

Through Hildebrand, Bunn learned of Ray and some of his work. Since a public university was much more affordable, Bunn transferred to Texas A&M’s main campus in College Station and then headed to TAMUG, which at the time was considered part of the main campus, in search of someone who would listen to his pleas for a marine science curriculum.

Up to then, Texas A&M offered undergraduate degrees in basic sciences like biology, chemistry and physics. Specialized training in fields like marine science was offered only as graduate courses.

Bunn’s entreaties fell on deaf ears until he found Ray, a man he had heard of but never met.

“With the title ‘doctor’ I was envisioning a large man of stature with a coat and tie, and here is this little guy who is up to his elbows in rubber gloves to welcome me aboard down there,” Bunn chuckles as he recounts his first meeting with Ray. “He had a genuine interest and availed himself to me to hear what I was interested in hearing my proposal. I explained the courses that I had taken with Henry Hildebrand and others at the University of Corpus Christi and the need for an undergraduate degree along those lines. We talked about the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Environmental Protection Agency and their need for people with that type of degree and studies. Sammy saw those organizations as career paths for his students.”

Ray and Bunn put together the curriculum that Bunn followed for the next two years despite the fact that, although the degree had been approved by the university and the state, it had not yet been fully implemented at the Galveston campus. Tension mounted during Bunn’s final semester because he had interviewed with NOAA about joining the agency’s Commissioned Officer Corps, a uniformed service that oversees command of NOAA’s research vessel fleet, but he was in danger of not receiving the degree he needed to get the job.

Although TAMUG was approved to offer a marine science degree solely at the Galveston school, there was a question of whether Bunn would not be allowed to graduate because he had not taken any courses at TAMUG.

“I told TAMUG’s president, ‘We don’t currently offer all of the required classes down here,’” Ray recalls. “I said, ‘You can’t stop him from graduating because he has fulfilled all of the requirements and we are part of Texas A&M University and he is getting a Texas A&M degree.’”

Had he not been allowed to graduate, Bunn was faced with going to school for two

more semesters to complete a biology degree. By his own admission Bunn was at the end of his rope and most likely would not have stayed in college. Because of his scuba diving experience, he was being courted by the U.S. Navy to join the SEALs and work in underwater demolition.

Ray's guidance and persistence ended with Bunn spending 25 years as part of the NOAA Corps before retiring and working for the agency as a civilian.

"Without a doubt, I owe Dr. Sammy Ray a lot," says Bunn. "He probably had more to lose in a deal like that than I'll ever know about. There was every reason to try to get students to stay around for graduate school, to hold marine science exclusively as a graduate degree."

Ray's determination in the face of opposition led one of his graduate students to dub him "the turtle" because once he has a goal in mind he plods methodically toward it. When flack comes from the administration, be it at TAMUG or the College Station campus, Ray hunkers down in his shell and stands steadfast until the storm is over. He sticks his head out to make sure that all is clear and then he resumes his journey.

"A lot of people might not be proud of that nickname, but I am," Ray laughs.

He loves working with young people because "they are alive and energetic. They have a youthful enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is a requirement for anything you do. Sometimes when I talk to a student who is not enthusiastic about their research or what they want to do, I say, 'If you don't think it's important, how do you expect me to think it's important? If you are not enthusiastic about it, don't do it.'

"It makes me feel young to deal with them and to try to connect with them," says Ray. "One of the things that happens too often in academia is that some professors are too pompous to lower themselves to work with young people. The other reason that I want to work with young kids is that they are our future."

Sammy Mehedy Ray was born in Mulberry, Kan., on Feb 25, 1919, under a name he would not discover for more than 40 years. His father was Syrian, born in what is now Lebanon. The elder Ray came to the United States at the age of 14 to escape service in the Turkish Army. He Americanized his Arabic last name of Raya by dropping the last vowel.

Sammy's mother was of French, Canadian and Irish ancestry. The couple met in the Detroit area, where there was a large Turkish community. They moved to Mulberry, a strip-mining town situated in far southeast Kansas on the Missouri border. Like most of the men in town, Ray's father worked in the mine.

The couple gave their first born an Arabic name that never stuck. Shortly after his birth, a friend of his mother's asked the baby's name. "My mother told her my Arabic name and her friend said, 'I'm not going to use that. His name is going to be 'Sammy.'

It is the only name Ray has ever used.

Sometime during the 1970s, Ray wanted to convert some of his military time into teacher retirement system credits. To do so, he needed a birth certificate. "My mother told me to write to the Bureau of Vital Statistics in Girard, Kan., and they would send me a birth certificate. The certificate they sent had my name misspelled. It should have been Hussein Mehedy Raya."

One form and \$1 later, he is officially Sammy M. Ray.

About a year after Ray's birth, the family moved to Mississippi, living in several small towns near the Mississippi River before finally settling in Rosedale. "At that time, the primary industry in Rosedale was bootlegging," Ray says. "They claimed to make the best white lightening in the state of Mississippi."

Ray's father avoided becoming involved in the town's cottage industry and instead became a peddler who sold dry goods to the black sharecroppers. The family also ran a small barbecue stand that doubled as their home.

Ray's interest in biology began at that barbecue stand. Every night, thousands of bugs gathered underneath the large light illuminating the porch of the stand. Sammy and his mother began catching the bugs and created their own collection. It got Sammy hooked on learning about nature.

Sammy helped his family add to their income by popping popcorn and roasting peanuts. The family paid someone a penny a bag to sell the snacks on the street and in front of the Rosedale movie theater and the Rays kept the rest of the 5 cent selling price.

During the height of the depression, "things got so tough that we couldn't afford the penny a bag. Then I went out on the street and sold popcorn and peanuts. Every night, except

"If you aren't enthusiastic about it (research), don't do it."

Sunday, I would go to the theater, which was just a block from the barbecue stand, and I'd sell popcorn, peanuts, candy and gum with a mason jar box around my neck. I used a mason jar box because it had partitions in it. At the time it was very demeaning for me to be selling popcorn and peanuts while my peers were going to the movie. But in retrospect it was good training because now there is nothing I won't do as long as it's honest."

In the summer of 1937, while still in high school, Ray was offered a job as a postal clerk making \$60 per month. That was good money at the time considering the superintendent of his high school was paid \$100 per month, and he had a master's degree in mathematics from University of Chicago. But the superintendent also lived in a home provided by the school, complete with paid utilities. But given the alternatives, the postal job was sweet.

"For me in this little town of 2,000 people, there was nothing for me to do except clerk in a grocery store or a dry goods store," says Ray. "I didn't want to be a peddler. I knew then that I didn't want to do what my father was doing. But how was I going to make a living? This \$60 looked pretty damn good. My parents wanted me to take the job."

As good as the postal job was, something inside Sammy made him visit a family friend who had tried to get Ray interested in ornithology. The man, Gordon Viden, was in charge of a Works Project Administration (WPA) project to open three museums — one each in a high school, junior college and senior college.

"Gordon said to me, 'Sammy, if you don't finish high school, you'll be making the greatest mistake of your life,'" Ray recalls. "He asked me if I'd stay in school if I could make \$38 per month."

The job was collecting and mounting birds for Viden's museums. Viden's taxidermist was about to leave and Viden needed a replacement. Sammy needed a



Sammy Ray displays the plaque he received upon induction into the Texas Science Hall of Fame in January 2002.

good paying job that would allow him to go to school and work during his free hours and on weekends. Needless to say, Ray never worked for the postal service.

"I finished high school, graduating twelfth out of class of 13, but that's not as bad as it sounds. Twelve of the 13 completed at least two years of college. That was pretty damn good for a state like Mississippi in the depth of the depression. The only person who didn't go to college was the salutatorian, and he went to art school. He was killed in World War II. He was a tail gunner on a B-17."

After high school, Ray had his choice of staying close to home and attending a teachers' college 20 miles away or going to Sunflower Junior College, which was 60 miles away. The choice was tougher than it sounds because at the time the only way Sammy could make it to either school was by hitchhiking. He could not afford train fare, let alone a car.

Ray chose Sunflower Junior College because he felt he had the best rapport with the staff there. Ray chuckles about his choice, quoting New York Yankees' legend Yogi Berra who said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."

"I've come to a lot of forks in the road in my life, and I took the fork," says Ray. "I always felt that choice of schools was one of my best."

While still in high school, Ray met an alluring girl named Charlotte (pronounced Sha-lot', the French pronunciation in deference to her grandmother's roots in Alsace-Lorraine) at a dance in Rosedale. By a quirk of fate, Charlotte was a student at Sunflower Junior College. When Ray found her there, they started dating.

"If we make it to the 12th of June of this year we will have been married 59 years," Ray boasts.

Sammy and Charlotte still act like newlyweds even after 59 years together. As with any couple, they have their differences. Charlotte likes formal dress on occasion, but there are few formal occasions when Sammy's preferred khaki is appropriate. As his induction to the Science Hall of Fame neared, Ray feared he would have to wear a tuxedo to the event.

"My wife just loves to get me into a tuxedo. Maybe she wants to punish me for something I've done," says Ray. He breathed a sigh of relief, albeit slight,

when he found out a suit would suffice for the banquet.

Charlotte and the couple's oldest son also have a penchant for luxury cars, an extravagance that Sammy simply cannot understand.

"My wife promises to take me to the graveyard in a BMW and with a tux on," Ray says grinning broadly. "I said, 'Woman, if you do, I'm going to wake up and give you a tongue lashing you'll never forget.'"

Sammy continued to collect and stuff birds during his junior college years. The experience was a personal breakthrough for him because he realized he was good at something that not many other people could do. Slowly, Ray began to overcome a low self-esteem problem that had plagued a part-Arab child since elementary school.

"I was too dark to play with white folks and I was too light to play with black folks," Ray remembers. "I didn't have a helluva lot of friends when I was growing up."

Sammy graduated from Sunflower Junior College in the spring of 1940. He wanted to go to Cornell because at the time it had three of the world's outstanding ornithologists on its faculty. He tried to borrow money to afford tuition, "but then I realized that I couldn't afford a round-trip train ticket to Ithaca, New York."

Instead, Ray applied to and was accepted by Louisiana State University (LSU). It marked one of the turning points in the history of his name. Up to that time, Ray had spelled his first name "Sammie." Many teachers had castigated him for going by what they considered a nickname instead of a proper Christian name. The precocious Ray often reminded them that not everyone in the world was a Christian.

One teacher urged him to end his first name in "y" because ending it in "ie" made it sound like a girl's name. At first he resisted, but he relented when his acceptance letter to LSU came addressed to "Miss Sammie Ray."

The spelling change proved to be the easiest part of attending LSU. Although he was accepted to a public university closer to home, the university did not pay

travel expenses. Ray had to REALLY want to go to college.

"A 60-mile hitchhike to Sunflower Junior College was easy compared to the 300-mile hitchhike to LSU," Ray says. "I had a suitcase I could carry, but the problem was, how was I going to get my footlocker to Baton Rouge from Rosedale, Miss. I worked out a deal with the guy who ran the train station in Rosedale. At that time they were still running passenger trains through Rosedale and on down to Baton Rouge — it was the Illinois Central. The guy checked my baggage as if I had bought a ticket. My steamer trunk got shipped surreptitiously for free to Baton Rouge."

In essence, Ray's trunk rode first class while Ray had to hustle rides.

"I went to LSU for two years and any time I went home or went back to school it was always by hitchhiking," he says.

One requirement at LSU was that Ray had to join the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC).

"As much as I disliked being in a ROTC unit — this was in the period between 1940 and 1942 when things were heating up in World War II — that uniform was a great ticket for hitchhiking. People just didn't pass up people in uniform," Ray says.

He could not continue his WPA job at LSU, so Sammy took a job mounting birds at a museum on campus for \$20 a month. He spent \$7 a month living in a room in LSU's football stadium.

For 18 months he lived on 35 cents per day. He did not eat breakfast and ate a 15-cent hamburger poor boy for lunch. "At night I'd eat two eggs, grits, rice and all of the French bread and oleo I could eat," Ray remembers. "Two days a week I had drill at noon. I had classes before drill and after drill, so I didn't eat lunch. Then I could spend my entire 35 cents on a steak. You had to have good teeth to eat that steak, but I kind of looked forward to those two days."

By taking a heavy course load, Sammy completed his bachelor's degree in biology in 18 months. His new degree allowed him to get a teaching assistantship in comparative anatomy, which doubled his monthly salary.

"Everything is relative, but when you

suddenly increase your income by \$20 a month, it means you can have a Coke that you couldn't have before, you can go to a movie that you couldn't afford before," says Ray.

Through several twists and turns of his academic career, Sammy found himself faced with the choice between being drafted into the Army and enlisting in another branch of the service. He chose to enlist in the U.S. Navy and became a U.S. Marine Corps medic. Sammy shipped out to the South Pacific in early 1944, headed for islands like New Caledonia, Pavuvu, Peleliu and Okinawa.

Far from being intimidated, Ray looked forward to his new assignments.

"My commanding officer thought I was the craziest person he had ever met," laughs Ray. "People can't understand, particularly in a situation where you are getting shot at, why in the hell anybody would think about doing something like collecting birds. But that's why I was excited about going to the South Pacific. I knew they had all of these pretty birds. I went fully prepared to collect these birds. I had a special collecting gun, I had a .38-caliber revolver and I had to carry a .30-caliber carbine. I was the most armed non-combatant who ever hit a beach."

By the time he was discharged from the Marine Corps in 1946, Ray had decided to go to medical school. The University of Mississippi offered a two-year medical program and Ray arranged to start the program in the fall of 1947. It had been five years since he received his undergraduate degree, so Ray headed back to LSU in the spring of 1947 to "learn how to be a student again."

Fate had other plans. One of his former professors heard he was back in Baton Rouge and approached him about taking a temporary job with an oil company. Despite Sammy's protests about not needing a job because he was going to medical school, the professor convinced him to talk with a man named Albert Collier.

Several oil companies were facing lawsuits in Louisiana brought by people who felt pollution from coastal oil wells was killing the state's oysters. Collier was looking for a good field biologist to

help the oil companies study the problem. Ray admits that he spent half of his interview with Collier trying to talk himself out of a job that paid \$250 a month plus living expenses.

“About halfway through the interview I decided that \$250 a month plus living expenses in February 1947 was a pretty good deal that would allow me to save money, thus decreasing the amount I had to borrow for medical school,” says Ray. “I became interested in the job at that point and I decided to end the interview before I dug myself into a hole.

“I said, ‘Mr. Collier, if you think I have average intelligence and hard work will get your job done, I’m your man.’”

All of these years later, the two men are still friends. Ray is very proud of the fact that Collier, now in his 90s, attended Ray’s induction into the Science Hall of Fame.

Collier promised Ray that the original job would last six months. They were still working together almost four years later. In the interim, researchers discovered that dermo, and not oil field pollution, was killing the oysters. The oil company that hired Sammy, Gulf Oil, wanted someone to research the lifecycle of dermo so they offered Sammy a graduate fellowship to study the parasite. He chose to do his research at Rice University, where he obtained both a master’s degree and a doctorate.

Ray eventually followed Collier to Galveston, where Collier headed a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) lab that is now run by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Except for a few years spent working in Louisiana for the Texas A&M Research Foundation, Ray has been in Galveston ever since.

He has had good bosses and bad bosses, but never one who could dominate his independent spirit. An extremely honorable man, Ray never resorted to screaming histrionics when he disagreed with an administration’s decisions. He simply stated his well-reasoned opinion, argued cogently for his position and found a way to vent his frustrations when the situation did not go his way.

At one point Ray worked for the

USFWS laboratory, now the National Marine Fisheries Service lab, located at Fort Crockett. His supervisor stuck out in Sammy’s mind because he wore a moustache at a time when most men did not wear facial hair.

“This guy would frustrate me so,” says Ray through gritted teeth. “He would tell me to do something and I would say that I didn’t think we ought to do it, but then I said I would placate the guy and do whatever he wanted me to. I would write a report and present it at the next staff meeting. Then he would say to me, ‘Why did you do that?’ I would just go ballistic because I didn’t want to do the report in the first place.”

The situation finally prompted Ray to take a job that had previously been offered to him at the neighboring Texas A&M Marine Laboratory. The only problem was that the man leaving Ray’s new position would not do so for two months. That meant Ray had to find a way to release his frustrations for the next eight weeks.

For years, Ray had been playing an hour of ping-pong at lunch. “If I could play an hour of ping-pong, no day could be too bad. If I didn’t play an hour of ping-pong, no day could be good enough. That was how I got rid of my frustrations,” he says.

During his final two months with USFWS, “I’d get a new ping-pong ball and I’d draw a mustache on it. For one hour I’d just beat hell out of that ball. When I went to the weekly staff meeting, this guy would lob stuff at me and I’d just sit there and I’d smile and smile. Later, my friend would say, ‘Sammy, you sat there all that time and took all of that crap and you just smiled.’ I said, ‘Yeah, but what that guy didn’t know is that I just beat the hell out of him the hour before.’ I had vented all of my venom and I could just sit there.”

Ray’s stay at the Galveston marine lab was brief. A personality conflict with the lab’s director led Ray to take a job troubleshooting oyster problems in Louisiana for Texas A&M’s Research Foundation. He returned to the Galveston lab in 1960, and has been there ever since.

McKinney characterizes Ray as one of three men who most influenced his career and as being among the last of the “classic biologists.”

“They work across a broad agenda, a lot of phyla from an invertebrate standpoint. Those classic biologists could work with anything,” he says. “All of us nowadays are specialists. He is known for oysters but he has worked with everything from birds to you name it.

“When I started in school as an undergraduate, I got my scientific training from Dr. John Mackin, who was an invertebrate zoologist, and Dr. Sewell Hopkins, who was perhaps one of the greatest invertebrate zoologists I ever knew. They taught me my science, but Sammy was the one who taught me what to do with it.”

At an age when most people would have retired and long since stopped working, Ray scoffs at the idea. Not the retirement part, but stopping working. He draws a distinction between the two.

He negotiated a retirement that ended his administrative duties in 1991. Friends gave him a fitting retirement party and were surprised, to say the least, when Ray appeared back in his lab.

“I keep telling people that retiring and quitting working are different things,” says Ray. “I wanted to do more of what I wanted to do and retirement let me do that.”

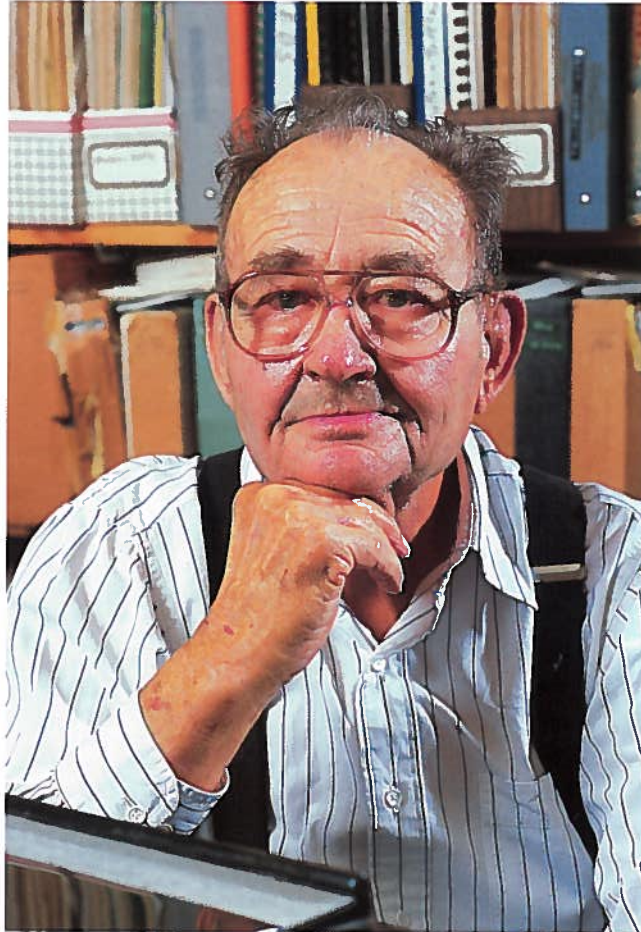
Since that first retirement party, Ray has had several more — five or six, but nobody is certain. It is a subject that elicits laughter and eye rolling on the part of Ray’s friends. McKinney has sworn off buying his friend any more retirement presents, although he’ll attend the parties if there is good food to be had.

Ray protests that none of the parties were his idea.

“I never intended to quit working,” he says. “It was those other people who felt I needed a party.

“The key to my survival is staying busy. If I woke up some morning and thought there wasn’t something important for me to do, I would be ready to expire — but I’ll never be ready to retire.”

Study nature, not books



Henry Hildebrand at his Flour Bluff home, surrounded by his scientific papers and journals.

His hair is disheveled and his pants ride slightly askew on his hips, perhaps because his suspenders aren't quite even or because his pants are a little large for his frame. It is late afternoon but Dr. Henry Hildebrand and his clothes look like they just got out of bed.

It is pretty much Hildebrand's usual state of dress. The man credited with finding and mapping the main nesting beach of the endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle is certainly not a slave to fashion.

The man who conducted groundbreaking research on the Laguna Madre in Texas and Mexico, shrimp grounds in the western Gulf of Mexico, harmful algal blooms, oil and tar on beaches, oyster shell dredging and saltwater dumping by oil companies into Texas streams does not waste much time worrying about his appearance.

For Hildebrand, who will turn 80 in August, this exceptionally casual approach to grooming is not a consequence of age. It is the way he has faced the world each day for most of his life.

"Henry never was much on what was 'in' as far as dress was concerned," recalls Dr. Lee Alverson, who met Hildebrand when both were students at the University of Washington in the late

1940s. "He was wearing some of his old military fatigues at that time. He was a very casual dresser."

Hildebrand's dress is a source of light humor for the legions of students he has inspired because it belies a razor sharp mind and vast intellect that allows Hildebrand to speak at length about any number of topics.

"Henry is a classic example of the certifiable genius who does not care what people think of him or the way he dresses," says Dr. Wes Tunnell, director of the Center for Coastal Studies at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. "He still

comes by my office weekly or once every two weeks. He never knocks, he just comes in. He is still wearing the clothes that he wore in the 1960s.

"He is usually complaining about the way somebody is managing the ocean, whether it is the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department or whomever. He is still reading and still staying on top of things. His mind is still sharp as a tack," continues Tunnell, who has known Hildebrand for the past 30 years. "You look at him and you think, 'Who is this bumpkin?' but he can tell you things. I always refer to him back in

those early days as the Neptune of the sea. He is like a walking encyclopedia of the ocean. He can talk about just about anything in the ocean. Unfortunately, he hardly ever published much after his early years. It is really a shame because he knows so much about the Western Gulf of Mexico down into Mexico."

NOAA's Alan Bunn will never forget the day he met Hildebrand in the early 1970s. It was about a week before classes began and Bunn, who was following his dream of becoming a marine biologist, headed to the biology



Henry Hildebrand works in The University of Texas Marine lab at Port Aransas in 1955.

building to meet his professors.

"I'm looking for a Professor Hildebrand, who I was assured would most likely be there in one of the labs," remembers Bunn. "At the far end of the hall walking toward me is this haphazard gentleman whose shirt was buttoned cockeyed, his pants had an old belt around them and hung loosely and frumpy, his glasses were kind of cockeyed. I thought I was approaching the janitor. I asked the janitor if he knew where I could find Dr. Hildebrand. He said, 'That's me.' That was my first introduction to the renowned oceanographer Dr. Henry Hildebrand."

Like Sammy Ray, Hildebrand is a classically trained biologist, but he never narrowed his focus to a specific field. Oh, he probably studied the Laguna Madre and fields related to commercial shrimping more than anything else, but he still completed significant research into subjects including blue crabs, oysters, shark ecology and fisheries, red tide, power plant thermal discharges, and sea turtle migrations and biology.

"I think his broad interests reflect back to the era that he grew up in and the training that he had. It was long before scientists became super-specialized just to survive in academia," says Dr. Russ Miget, environmental quality specialist with the Texas Marine Advisory Service. "I won't call him a naturalist per se, but he has a much broader vision of how the whole ecosystem — before that was a popular term — actually works. Probably as importantly, he has the training and background to do a lot of fieldwork. That is something that we both lament and seems to be lacking these days. There is more of an interest in modeling the big picture. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with that, it's just that I think when you devote your life to that you end up giving up something on the other end.

"A lot of what drove his field related studies was the fact that computers didn't exist so you went out and gathered the data yourself or with your students, then you came back and cranked out the statistics on a Big Chief

tablet with a number two pencil," says Miget, who is based at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and is one of the people Hildebrand visits almost weekly on campus. "I think those experiences of actually getting out in the field are what shaped his lifelong interest and continues to today. We still take an annual trip in my boat down the Laguna Madre when the weather warms up in the spring. We go down to the land cut and back, which is about as far as I can make it on a tank of gas. We measure salinity and temperature and check out the development on the spoil islands, do a little bird watching. We just get out and talk. He still really enjoys that, and I do, too."

Oddly, Hildebrand says the one thing he would do differently if he could repeat his more than 50-year career is, "I think I would have stayed in one field rather than branch out like I have. I've been in a great number of things."

"That surprises me," says Miget. "To me, that is his uniqueness. He did so many different things and became a semi-authority on them. To me, that gave him a better ability to roll all of these things together — turtles and bycatch and fishery production."

Hildebrand's passion for hands-on teaching in the field remains the model used for the curriculum at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. Through his approach to biology, Henry Hildebrand heeded the call of 19th Century Swiss scientist Louis Agassiz: "Study nature, not books."

"I credit him with being the one who started the marine science program on this island in 1957," says Tunnell. "We owe our legacy to him. He developed a hands-on, field marine biology program. We continued to pattern that when I came in here in 1974 and still today our fame is this hands-on, marine science get out in the field and learn about things from the field, not just in the lab or in the books. Henry started that."

Henry's research was not limited to Texas or even the United States. He studied the king crab fishery in the Bering Sea and the cod fishery at Ungava Bay in Quebec, and his trips to

Mexico and Central America are legendary.

Beginning in the late 1950s or early 1960s, Hildebrand took yearly trips to Mexico and British Honduras, now Belize, with a dozen or so students in tow. The trips were spawned by his desire to see parts of Central America and the Yucatan, but he took students because "well, they were my students and they wanted to go."

The reefs around the Turneffe Islands, just off the coast of Belize, were a common destination for Hildebrand and his students, but they were not the group's only stop. On the way down or on the return trip home, Hildebrand always included side trips to places like the Mayan ruins at Chichén Itza and Uxmal.

"Henry gave us a gift," says Dinah Bowman, one of Hildebrand's former students and a prominent marine life artist. "He exposed us to more than coral reefs. We would stop and visit various ruins down in Mexico or he would arrange a trip through a mariculture center or a shrimping center in Tampico or further south."

Hildebrand also exposed his students to more than one unusual adventure.

Normally when one of Henry's groups visited Belize, they would camp on an island called Caye Caulker and use small boats during the day to conduct assessments of reefs, grass flats or whatever subject Hildebrand had selected for the trip.

But during one trip in the early 1970s, Hildebrand developed a much more extensive plan that called for diving on a blue hole — an underwater cave that is exposed through a partially collapsed ceiling — in addition to conducting reef assessments. To carry out that plan, Hildebrand chartered a larger motor sailor with the thought that he and his students could camp for a day or two on an island in the Turneffe complex and then pull anchor and travel to another island.

Bunn recalls that the gentleman who provided the boat was looking for additional publicity, so he talked with the newspapers and some local folks about how a prominent American

scientist and his students had chartered the gentleman's boat so they could do various coral studies. The researchers were also going to dive a blue hole and maybe see about aging the thing through carbon dating, or so the boat owner said.

About two days into the cruise, police boats showed up and carted Hildebrand back to shore, leaving his students in stunned disbelief. "They had gotten reports that we were going to crack off stalactites and stalagmites and carbon date them," recalls Bunn.

So the government brought Hildebrand to the capitol under the pretext that he had not obtained the proper permits to conduct his research. Hildebrand ended up striking a deal with the government: The reef studies would continue but the dive on the blue hole was cancelled. With that, the police took

Hildebrand back to his students.

"It was a big disappointment to a lot of us but at the same time it saved the trip and we were still able to do the rest of our research," says Bunn.

That trip sticks in Bowman's mind for another reason.

"We were camped out on a little island and a tremendous storm came up," she remembers. "You can imagine waking up and floating in your tent on your air mattress. The wind was howling and it was just horrid. We were wet, bedraggled and glad to be alive after that. While we lightered everything back onto the boat we were concerned about the little sharks that were running around in the water."

On another trip, Hildebrand and his students were in Mexico and heading back to the United States when their vehicle, a well-known International Travel-All that belonged to the University of Corpus Christi, hit a slick spot in the road and overturned. "I remember lying there hoping nobody was hurt," Hildebrand says. Fortunately, no one was injured."

The only real damage to the Travel-All

was a missing windshield. The group managed to turn the vehicle back over and resumed their trip sans windshield — in the face of a blue norther.

For Bunn, his trip to Belize left a lasting impression of Hildebrand.

"When I think of Henry Hildebrand I think of

Acropora palmata (elkhorn coral) and *Acropora cervicornis* (staghorn coral). He forced us to memorize these crazy scientific names of corals, fish and sponges.

"Just one trip to Belize and Henry's expertise and knowledge were obvious and that was one of the finest trips and one of the finest classrooms I've ever had," he says. "We swam and dove and fished every day. You caught your own dinner. It was a fabulous experience. But you were sitting there at night studying those scientific names because the next morning before you could board the boat you would be tested on them. There was pressure, but it was fantastic. He was a hard driven man. There was not much funny play. It was all business and you retained what he gave you."

Bunn is not sure why the scientific names for coral stuck in his mind these many years later. For most of his professional life in NOAA's Commissioned Officer Corps he had little reason to use them. But then there was that time when he was managing one of NOAA's national marine sanctuaries and he was asked to take a special group diving.

"Vice President Dan Quayle and his family came to the sanctuary and we dove on a coral reef. When they asked the species of coral there, not only could I give the common name but that scientific name came rolling off my tongue as well. I have Henry Hildebrand to thank for that."

Students were not Hildebrand's only companions on his jaunts south of the border. In the early 1990s he convinced Sammy Ray, a good friend since the 1960s, to go into Mexico and study the oyster industry there.

For about 10 days the pair drove through Mexico in Hildebrand's Subaru Brat, a small cross between a pickup truck and a car. "If there was somebody walking along the road Henry would stop and they would pile in the back," Ray remembers. "Henry drove pretty fast. We'd get into mountainous country and we'd be coming around a curve. I'm already white-knuckled, hanging on, and Henry would say, 'Gosh, I wonder what's on the



Dr. Hildebrand with his students in Palengue, Mexico.

other side?’ And I’d say, ‘Henry, let’s don’t find out.’”

They followed a creek whose waters flowed toward the oyster reefs. Along the way Ray noticed that several outhouses had been built over the creek. That meant there was a danger that bacteria from human waste might contaminate the oysters downstream.

Of course, the pair’s Mexican hosts wanted them to eat some of the local oysters and, predictably, they declined.

“Word got back that there were two gringos bad-mouthing the oysters,” Ray laughs. “Our trip was stopped for a couple of days until we got clearance from Mexico City and had some biologists escort us on our trips to show us various places. We made a run all the way down to south of Veracruz looking at the Mexican oyster industry.”

Henry Hildebrand’s journey to the Texas coast began in the landlocked state of Kansas. He was born in Fowler, Kan., to a high school teacher and a teacher-turned-housewife. From the time he entered high school, Hildebrand was interested in zoology and fisheries because of the influence of his uncle, Samuel Hildebrand, who is considered one of the greatest ichthyologists ever produced by this country.

Henry received a bachelor’s degree in zoology from the University of Kansas and a master’s degree in fisheries from McGill University in Montreal. After he left McGill University, Hildebrand began taking graduate courses at the University of Washington. He met and befriended underclassman Lee Alverson while the two worked in the museum on campus identifying fish.

“Henry had a significant flair for taxonomy,” says Alverson, now senior scientist at Natural Resources Consultants in Seattle. “He was a naturalist. He had a real dedication as a naturalist, that’s what I remember. He was a guy who was dedicated to bringing out the facts, but he didn’t tend to be an advocate on one side or the other.”

That alone sets Hildebrand apart from contemporarily trained scientists in Alverson’s view.

“Nowadays you get people coming out of school who are trained advocates for the environment or conservation rather than being trained as individuals who will provide the database and let society make the decisions,” he believes. “He was not pushed around by what was ‘in’ in the political

movements of the time or by some recent scientific theory. He didn’t jump on top of things until he fully understood them and he was very careful in his deliberations. He didn’t tend to be swayed emotionally at all.”

Henry left the University of Washington after a year and ended up at what is now The University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas, although he is not certain why. “I guess I wanted to look at the Gulf coast. I talked with (lab director) Gordon Gunter and we worked out a degree plan that was very satisfactory.”

He earned his Ph.D. from The University of Texas in 1954 and stayed in Port Aransas to work for Gunter for about a year before he and three friends ventured off to Veracruz to establish a pompano fishery. Pompano, a popular gamefish, thrive best in nearshore waters with good surf and high salinity because their main food is small shelled animals that live in the upper layers of sandy sea bottoms.

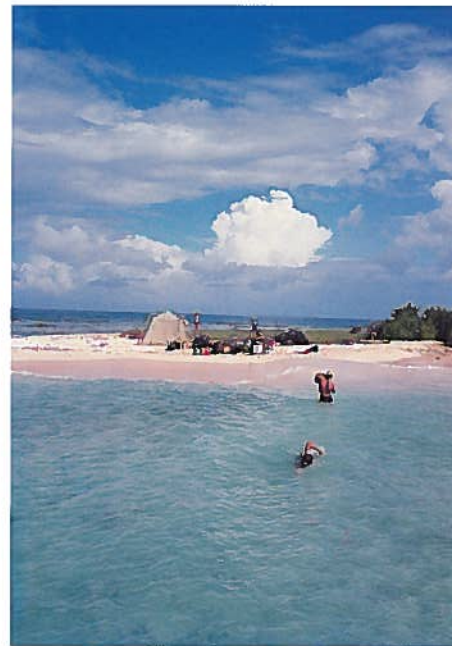
The promising venture failed before the three men reached Veracruz. They arrived shortly after a large red tide hit the area in 1955. The nearshore life that was not killed by the red tide left to find better feeding grounds.

Hildebrand returned to Corpus Christi, took a job teaching at the University of Corpus Christi (UCC), and has lived in the area ever since. The vast majority of Hildebrand’s celebrated work came while he worked for UCC, including what he considers one of his greatest achievements.

For years the nesting habits of the Kemp’s ridley sea turtle had been a scientific mystery. Researchers were certain that the smallest and most endangered of the sea turtles must have a nesting beach. The question was where.

“I spent considerable time searching for that beach in Veracruz and Tamaulipas,” says Hildebrand.

With help from local residents and others, Hildebrand felt strongly that the ridley’s main nesting beach was in an area of Tamaulipas called Rancho Nuevo. Natives of the area talked about large numbers of turtles coming ashore at one time to nest, but they



The Turneffe Islands was a frequent destination for Dr. Hildebrand and his students.

believed the turtles were the much larger loggerheads.

One of the unique traits of the Kemp's ridley and its close Pacific cousin, the olive ridley, is that they are the only species to nest during the day and in "arribadas," the Spanish word for "arrival." In an arribada, female Kemp's ridley sea turtles gather offshore and then head to the nesting beach together.

Arribadas today are relatively small by historical standards, the result of a ridley population that is just now recovering from near extinction.

Hildebrand mapped the area he thought to be the nesting beach and then tracked down a film made by an engineer and pilot, Andrés Herrera. The film captured a huge arribada in 1947. Scientists who viewed the film estimated that 40,000 female ridleys came ashore that day to nest. The film also confirmed that the beach the turtles used was Rancho Nuevo.

Hildebrand did not fancy working for a state institution, so he left UCC in 1973 as the once Baptist school became part of the Texas A&M University system.

Ironically, Hildebrand ended up taking a job with a public institution, Texas A&I University in Kingsville. He taught there from 1973 to 1979 before entering the private sector as a consultant, primarily for commercial fishing interests.

He retired in 1985.

Ask Hildebrand to reflect on the impact his research has had on the state of marine research or the lives of his students, and with typical modesty he claims, "I don't think I've had much impact at all."

"Henry Hildebrand is an unsung person because of his personality type," says Bowman. "He is not flamboyant, he is not egotistical, he is a semi-recluse. When I first saw the man I thought he was the janitor. He was a renegade in the fact that he didn't like to mess with paperwork that universities require. I think they just put up with him and his eccentricities at the University of Corpus Christi."

University researchers live and die by the philosophy, "Publish or perish." It is common knowledge in academia that to keep a job and get on the tenure track, a scientist must publish scholarly works in peer-reviewed journals.

Henry wrote many scholarly works, but



Hildebrand and his students generally camped on an island called Caye Caulker when they visited Belize and used small boats to study reefs or grass flats.

precious few were ever published. He was content to write a report for the organization that funded his research, and that was the end of it.

In his own defense, Hildebrand rattles off a number of projects that resulted in published papers. There was the shrimp fishery bycatch work he did as a doctoral student, some shark work he did for NMFS and, oh yes, a series of six reports he did on the Laguna Madre for Central Power and Light (CP&L).

The rub here is that Henry's definition of "publish" is apparently different than everyone else's.

"The work he did for CP&L was a five or six year project," says Tunnell. "He generated a ton of information about the Laguna Madre and the seagrass beds and the fish and fisheries and plankton, but he never published it. He wrote the report for CP&L and fortunately we were able to get copies of those reports, but he never published the bulk of the information from those reports."

Tunnell and Frank Judd, a professor at The University of Texas-Pan American, have preserved the information from the CP&L reports in their recently published book, *The Laguna Madre of Texas and Tamaulipas*, which is basically the life history of both hypersaline lagoons.

They relied heavily on Hildebrand's work



in creating the book. They dedicated the book to him for “of all of his untiring early efforts and studies in the 1950s and 1960s down in Mexico,” says Tunnell. “He basically financed them all by himself. Because it is such a remote place and nobody else was publishing about it, he provided really the only information we had about that lagoon system.”

The Texas and Mexican Lagunas resulted from a single lagoon that formed about 5,000 years ago as sand bars and

shoals formed parallel to the shore. The Rio Grande bisected the large lagoon and as the river’s delta grew it completely separated the big lagoon into the smaller ones that exist today.

The Laguna Madres in Texas and Tamaulipas are very similar. They are nearly identical in length. Part of the Mexican Laguna system is the Laguna El Catan, which is very similar to Baffin Bay in the Laguna Madre system. The Laguna Madre de has a large wind tidal flat that almost completely separates it into two parts known as the Northern and Southern Laguna de Tamaulipas. The upper and lower Laguna Madre would be totally separated by a large wind tidal flat had the Corps of Engineers not dredged the part of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway known as the “land cut.”

Many people think the Laguna Madre of Texas looked and acted like the Mexican Laguna before the 1940s, when the land cut was completed. Hildebrand’s studies of the Mexican Laguna since the 1950s offer the only glimpse scientists have of how the Laguna Madre system may have worked.

What Hildebrand lacks in a published legacy, he makes up for in a human one. Scores of his students have gone on to make impressive names for themselves. One is now the superintendent of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the largest

marine sanctuary in the country. Another headed the state of Florida’s manatee program until he retired.

Several Hildebrand students have risen to high offices in the federal Minerals Management Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service and other NOAA offices.

“Henry influenced me, too,” says Bowman, who is establishing a marine biology scholarship at TAMU-CC in Hildebrand’s name. “For a year or so I was the only woman who participated in his classes. I spoke to him about my desire to pursue biological illustration as a career. We’d talk about it and he would give me projects to try to work on it. But there at the university when I went, they wouldn’t allow you to minor outside of your major field, so I majored in marine biology and minored in chemistry.”

Bowman subsequently went back to school, completing a double major in terrestrial biology and art at Texas A&I. Then she opened a gallery in Portland, Texas. That was almost 25 years ago.

“I credit it to Henry instilling that self confidence in me and he does it in a very subtle way,” she says. “He demands stuff from you and lends his encouragement and his rapier wit and then lets you go on about your business. He didn’t play games. He wasn’t one of those professors who would set you up. He was a good guide.

“The man is extremely low profile. He just does his thing, writes papers, talks to people and in the past influenced a wide number of students who have since developed their own careers because of the foundation he gave them.”

Hildebrand’s physical health has curtailed his activity in the past few years. He still visits friends on the TAMU-CC campus almost weekly and he keeps up on marine issues by reading and by visiting the fish house in Flour Bluff, where he talks with fishermen about the state of the area’s fisheries.

Henry’s speech is a little slower and more measured now than it used to be, unless you mention one of the hot-button topics that still incite a quick tongued harangue like, say, commercial fishing regulations ...

“I think the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department’s regulations on shrimping are absurd — buying out boats — because the

number of boats has decreased and licenses have decreased by two-thirds and yet the state spent \$2.5 million more to buy licenses to drive it down lower,” Hildebrand fumes. “I don’t think there is any purpose in that. They do not tell what level they want the number of shrimp licenses to be. They’ve run up the cost of fishing and these shrimpers are having a hard time competing with farmed shrimp from Asia and China. TPWD did that by closing grounds; of course that probably didn’t make too much difference in the total catch but the shrimpers had to go further out to make their catches, so their cost of doing business was higher.”

He also continues to submit letters to the editor for publication in the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*. Those letters usually rail against — you guessed it — commercial shrimp regulations

“We have a group of people here who believe there is tremendous overfishing of shrimp,” he says. “The shrimp respond to environmental conditions. If you have good environmental conditions, you have a good catch. If you have poor environmental conditions, you have a poor catch. In my time, which is about 50 years, there are times when the fishermen have said that they weren’t making catches and then the next year they would catch four times as much as they did in the poor year.”

Hildebrand’s research involving and support for the state’s commercial shrimping industry earned him a lifetime achievement award from the Texas Shrimp Association, an offshore shrimping industry group, in 2001.

Between his letters to the editor, his outspoken criticism of shrimping regulations and his recognition by a shrimping trade industry, it would be easy to accuse Hildebrand of being pro-shrimper. He may be pro-shrimper at times, but not just for the sake of being pro-shrimper.

“The thing about Henry, to me, is that he doesn’t look for a fight,” says Miget. “I’ve never seen that in his nature. Some people want to be on the opposing side because it gives them a certain sense of pleasure. Henry would be the first one to look at a regulation and, if it had a good scientific justification, say, ‘Hey, that’s exactly what we need.’”

“I think Henry is concerned because in

the last 20 years to 30 years there has been a proliferation of non-profit environmental activists, some very well meaning and some with perhaps agendas other than the environment per se, who maybe have more influence on regulatory decisions than the biology would dictate. That is the reality and I think pretty much everybody understands that and lives with it anymore. In Henry’s case, he believes it is not really good science.

“Probably an overriding, and to me one of the most impressive, attributes of Henry Hildebrand is that he has always discussed policy, regulations, particularly as it relates to the commercial harvest of fishery products in the Gulf of Mexico, with a genuine concern for the economic welfare of people in the industry,” says Miget.

Hildebrand has a real compassion for people and their desire to make a living off a renewable resource, Miget observes.

“Even though he spent his career in academia, he never lost sight of the fact that the majority of people in this world have to work for a living,” Miget says, admittedly tongue-in-cheek. “I think it is easy to sit back and try to pass regulations with the best of intentions because you think they are good for the environment, but Henry genuinely puts the person who would be displaced first and then says, ‘Do we have the information to weigh against what this is going to do from a socio-economic standpoint?’”

Miget has worked in Corpus Christi since the mid 1970s and he says he knew of Henry Hildebrand, but he didn’t get to know Henry on a personal level until about 10 years ago. He says he regrets a bit not getting to know Henry earlier, while Henry was still teaching, but he feels fortunate to be able to spend time with Hildebrand at a time when others of Henry’s age might get tired of talking about their pasts.

“He obviously enjoyed what he did so much that he continues to keep current with it,” notes Miget. “His eyes still light up when he starts talking about something that really gets him emotional, particularly if it deals with peoples’ livelihoods and what he perceives as a not very well founded new regulation. I hope I’ve got that kind of enthusiasm and mental acuity when I’m that age.” ■

Texas Shores encourages readers to submit letters to the editor on any topic, as long as it relates to marine issues, or in response to others printed in the magazine.

Limit your letters to 300 words. *Texas Shores* reserves the right to edit letters for length and potentially libelous materials. All letters must be signed and include a daytime telephone number. Once received, letters become the property of *Texas Shores* and cannot be returned.

Send your letters to: *Texas Shores*, 2700 Earl Rudder Freeway South, Suite 1800, College Station, TX 77845, Attn: Letters to the Editor.

Objections voiced to issue on fishing families

The Winter 2002 issue of *Texas Shores* is an enlightening tribute to the Texas pioneer shrimpers. Hats off to those men and women who recognize the over fishing of the shrimp stocks, the decline of other marine resources and the need for their own children and grandchildren to seek college educations and profitable careers.

I believe U.S. taxpayers' funds are used to support and operate Sea Grant programs and publish *Texas Shores*; yet, those of us interested in protecting sea turtles and conservation of other marine animals are subjected to insulting and inaccurate statements in this issue.

As TPWD's Hal Osburn said on page 20, "regulations were a consequence of government's duty and mandate to deal with conflicts and problems with a public resource." He also rightfully referred to "the tragedy of the commons," or the inability of the shrimp industry to regulate itself as the quantity and quality of shrimp decline. Shrimpers don't produce the shrimp, like farmers produce their crops. Shrimpers just take the shrimp from public waters, putting nothing back in return. Shrimpers probably pay income and other taxes, as well as license fees, but they get favored tax treatment as fishers. Other taxpayers and shrimp consumers are picking up most of the tab for managing the fishery. So, shrimpers should not be so quick to criticize and blame the very people who not only buy their product but also are concerned about the health of the shrimp stocks and protection of other marine life.

Instead of perpetuating myths and encouraging discord, **Texas Shores** should be striving to paint a more truthful, complete and accurate picture of the relationship among common-property marine resources, fisheries conservation and management, and the fishers as well as others who benefit from them.

—Carole H. Allen, founder
and chairperson, HEART
(Help Endangered
Animals-Ridley Turtles),
Houston.

LETTERS

SPRING
2002

